

REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics and Criticism*

The language of Saudi Arabia's green economic transition: A discourse-historical analysis of metaphor, modality, and legitimation

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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia's green economic transition is implemented through projects, finance, regulation, and institutional coordination, but it is also made publicly meaningful through language. This article examines how Arabic institutional discourse represents the transition, calibrates commitment, and justifies preferred actors and solutions. It applies a qualitative, corpus-assisted discourse-historical approach to 15 public Arabic source pages from the Saudi Green Initiatives, the Public Investment Fund, Saudi Aramco, and the Ministry of Energy. From those pages, 105 complete headlines, slogans, and policy clauses (804 Arabic tokens) were extracted as an analytical micro-corpus covering 2021–2025 and undated pages accessed in July 2026. Metaphor analysis identifies journey/transition as the largest family (46 units), followed by construction/materialization (24) and greening/growth/life (20). Modal choices combine obligation and formal commitment with future certainty, aspiration, and capacity, producing what the article calls managed certainty. Legitimation is led by rationalization (59 units), supported by moral evaluation, mythopoesis, and authorization. The discourse gives the transition a clear route, a capable institutional driver, measurable milestones, and a moral destination. It also humanizes policy through quality of life, future generations, jobs, and collective responsibility. Critically, however, citizens appear more often as beneficiaries or behavioural partners than as participants in deciding trade-offs. Labour adjustment, affordability, consumption, and distribution are less visible than technology, investment, supply, and national leadership. The article concludes that the discourse effectively joins climate action, energy security, and diversification, while a more inclusive next phase would make uncertainty, costs, accountability, and citizen agency more explicit.

KEYWORDS: Arabic institutional discourse, discourse-historical approach, green economy, legitimation, metaphor, modality, Saudi Arabia, sustainability

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1. Introduction

For a family, a green transition is not an abstract policy phrase. It can mean cleaner air, a new kind of job, a different electricity system, a protected landscape, or a change in the cost and habits of everyday life. For an engineer or investor, it can mean a solar project, a hydrogen facility, a financing framework, or a new market. For a worker, it may bring opportunity, retraining, or uncertainty. These material experiences do not arrive without language. Before a transition is lived, it is named, explained, promised, measured, and defended.

This is why phrases such as “the green era,” “paving the way,” “driving transformation,” and “bearing fruit” deserve serious attention. They are not merely stylistic decorations. A road has a direction and a destination. A driver controls movement. A harvest promises that earlier effort will produce a benefit. When such expressions recur across official websites, speeches, project pages, and investment documents, they help construct a shared understanding of what the transition is, who leads it, and which questions seem reasonable to ask.

Saudi Arabia is an analytically important case because environmental policy is communicated alongside three priorities that can complement one another but can also create tension: economic diversification, continued energy security, and climate action. The Saudi Green Initiative states that climate action, energy security, and economic prosperity should receive equal attention, while the Public Investment Fund presents green finance as a tool for environmental goals and economic diversification. Saudi Aramco frames the issue as meeting growing energy needs while managing emissions, and the Ministry of Energy presents the transition through concrete project capacities and costs. The public narrative therefore does not treat the green economy as a separate environmental programme. It integrates it into a broader project of national transformation (SGI-H; PIF-GF; ARAM-C; MOE-P).

The same integration connects the study to four Sustainable Development Goals. SDG 8 links growth with diversification, innovation, decent work, and resource efficiency. SDG 9 focuses on resilient infrastructure and cleaner industrial development. SDG 12 addresses sustainable production, consumption, waste, and resource use. SDG 13 calls for climate action to be integrated into national planning. A discourse study cannot establish whether these goals have been achieved. It can identify which dimensions are repeatedly foregrounded, which actors are assigned responsibility, and which social or ecological questions remain less visible.

Environmental discourse scholarship has long shown that language shapes the political possibilities of environmental action (Hajer, 1995; Dryzek, 2013; Stibbe, 2021). Studies of metaphor explain how complex problems become understandable through familiar source domains such as journeys, war, balance, growth, and construction (Charteris-Black, 2004; Semino, 2008; Musolff, 2016). Research on modality shows how policy texts vary the force of commitments through necessity, intention, possibility, and future prediction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Palmer, 2001). Legitimation analysis asks why audiences should regard a policy as authoritative, rational, moral, or narratively desirable (van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). Yet these dimensions are often treated separately, and relatively little work has examined how they combine historically in Arabic green-economic discourse.

Recent Saudi-focused research has identified metaphorical framing in official discourse on sustainability and essential-needs supply (Altamimi & Wani, 2026). The present study extends that line of inquiry in four ways. It focuses specifically on the economic transition, places metaphor beside modality and legitimation, compares several institutional roles rather than treating official communication as one voice, and uses a discourse-historical sequence to distinguish launch, implementation, measurement, and socialization. The purpose is not to dismiss official language as publicity, nor to accept it at face value. It is to understand how credible policy narratives are built from real targets, projects, values, and strategic silences.

The study asks four questions: (1) Which metaphor families organize Saudi Arabia’s green economic transition in the selected Arabic corpus? (2) How does modality calibrate obligation, aspiration, capacity, and certainty? (3) Which legitimation strategies make the transition and its principal actors appear necessary, credible, and desirable? (4) What human roles, tensions, and silences become visible when these patterns are read historically and critically? The central argument is that the transition is constructed as managed continuity rather than disruptive rupture. Language presents it as a directed journey, designed and accelerated by capable institutions, verified through numbers, and morally linked to prosperity and future generations. That narrative is coherent and often substantively anchored, but it gives less space to contested costs, labour adjustment, consumption, affordability, and citizen influence over the route itself.

2. Literature, Context, and Research Gap

Green transitions are never only technical substitutions. They reorder investment, infrastructure, expertise, employment, and expectations about the future. Environmental discourse therefore works at the boundary between material change and social interpretation. Hajer (1995) showed how discourse coalitions can stabilize particular understandings of environmental problems, while Dryzek (2013) demonstrated that environmental politics is organized through recurring narratives such as administrative rationalism, sustainable development, and ecological modernization. In contemporary policy communication, green growth frequently becomes a bridge between ecological protection and economic expansion. It promises that innovation and efficiency can reduce conflict between the two.

That bridge is useful, but it is not neutral. A technological frame tends to make engineering, investment, and managerial coordination highly visible. Questions about distribution, demand, power, or limits may receive less attention. Stibbe's (2021) ecolinguistic approach is helpful here because it asks which stories a society repeatedly tells about progress, nature, and the good life. The critical task is not to reject an optimistic story simply because it is optimistic. It is to examine whose experience is included, what evidence supports the story, and what alternatives the story makes difficult to imagine.

Metaphor is central to this process. Conceptual metaphor theory treats metaphor as a way of understanding one domain through another, not merely as an ornament (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Critical metaphor analysis adds questions of persuasion, evaluation, and ideology (Charteris-Black, 2004). Journey metaphors, for example, present change as directional, staged, and measurable. Construction metaphors represent the future as something designed by identifiable builders. Growth metaphors associate policy with life, renewal, and natural development. War or race metaphors create urgency and opponents. Balance metaphors acknowledge tension but imply that expert management can hold competing priorities together. Political metaphor analysis also warns that repeated scenarios can become miniature narratives with heroes, obstacles, and expected endings (Musolff, 2016).

Modality supplies a different layer of meaning. A sentence may describe the same goal as compulsory, intended, possible, scheduled, or inevitable. In systemic-functional grammar, modality expresses degrees of probability, usuality, obligation, and inclination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Palmer (2001) distinguishes epistemic assessments of truth from deontic meanings of obligation and dynamic meanings of ability. In Arabic policy discourse, these meanings appear through lexical verbs and constructions such as *يجب* (must/should), *مزمّت* (commits), *يبحث* (seeks), *فدّت* (aims), *نكّم* (can), and future prefixes such as *تس*. Fairclough (2003) notes that such choices are socially consequential because they distribute certainty and responsibility. A passive future such as *عورش مّل اذيفنت متيس* ("the project will be implemented") can make an outcome sound orderly while leaving the responsible actor implicit.

Legitimation explains why the chosen action should be accepted. Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) identifies four broad strategies. Authorization invokes leaders, laws, institutions, experts, or recognized standards. Moral evaluation links action to values such as responsibility, prosperity, fairness, or protection. Rationalization justifies action by its purpose, function, expertise, or measurable benefit. Mythopoesis tells a story in which appropriate conduct produces success and inappropriate conduct produces loss. In green-transition discourse, these strategies commonly overlap. A target year authorizes planning, a capacity figure rationalizes investment, a reference to future generations moralizes the goal, and a journey metaphor places all three inside a story of progress.

The discourse-historical approach adds time and intertextuality. DHA does not analyse a phrase as if it appeared in a vacuum. It asks how actors are named, which qualities are attributed to them, which argumentation topoi connect claims to conclusions, whose perspective dominates, and how statements are intensified or softened (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It also traces how expressions move across genres and historical stages. Corpus-assisted critical analysis can support this work by identifying recurrence and distribution, provided that counts remain connected to close reading rather than being treated as self-explanatory evidence (Baker et al., 2008).

In Saudi green communication, history matters. Vision 2030 established transformation, diversification, investment, quality of life, and future orientation as central national themes. The launch of the Saudi Green Initiative in 2021 gave climate action a more explicit institutional vocabulary. Subsequent pages and forum reports

added targets, renewable-energy capacities, investment values, biodiversity measures, and public campaigns. The discourse therefore develops through recontextualization: the national transformation story is not replaced by an environmental story; it is made greener. At the same time, the green story is made economically familiar through innovation, investment, jobs, and competitiveness.

The research gap lies in the interaction of these layers. Prior work has shown that Saudi sustainability discourse uses metaphors of journeys, security, protection, greening, and continuity (Altamimi & Wani, 2026). What remains less clear is how metaphor works together with modal force and legitimation, how institutional differences affect the language, and how the narrative changes as a programme moves from launch to measurable implementation and everyday participation. Addressing that gap requires a bounded Arabic corpus, explicit coding, and a critical distinction between what discourse claims and what policy has materially achieved.

3. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework combines the discourse-historical approach with critical metaphor analysis, modality analysis, and van Leeuwen's legitimation model. The combination is deliberate rather than additive. DHA supplies the historical and institutional context; metaphor identifies the imagined shape of transition; modality measures the force of claims; and legitimation explains why selected actors and solutions are presented as acceptable.

Five DHA strategies guide the close reading. Nomination asks how actors and processes are named: for example, "the Kingdom," "the Initiative," "the Fund," "the company," "society," or "future generations." Predication asks which qualities are attached to them, such as leading, ambitious, responsible, efficient, or vulnerable. Argumentation identifies the warrants that connect a problem to a proposed response. Recurrent topoi in this corpus include urgency, responsibility, expertise, economic benefit, measurable progress, and intergenerational duty. Perspectivization asks whose viewpoint structures the text. Intensification and mitigation identify how certainty or caution is linguistically managed.

Metaphorical expressions were grouped only when related lexical items formed a coherent source domain across more than one source. Thus, قيرط (road), قرح (journey), قراوطخ (steps), قريسم (course), قراخ (roadmap), قريسو (pace), and قرح (toward) form a journey-transition family when they collectively organize policy as movement to a destination. Building, drawing, laying foundations, producing impact, and making goals tangible form a construction-materialization family. Green, growth, flowering, fruit, and life form a greening-growth family. Leadership and era expressions were coded separately because they combine temporal change with political agency.

Modality was coded in five practical families. Commitment/obligation includes explicit commitment and requirement. Future certainty/continuity includes future markers, scheduling, and assertions of continued progress. Intention/aspiration covers aims, seeking, desire, and invitations. Necessity/urgency includes formulations of pressing need. Capacity/enabling includes possibility, ability, and institutional enabling. These categories do not create a simple scale from weak to strong. An aspirational verb can be rhetorically strengthened by a precise number, an authoritative actor, or a fixed date.

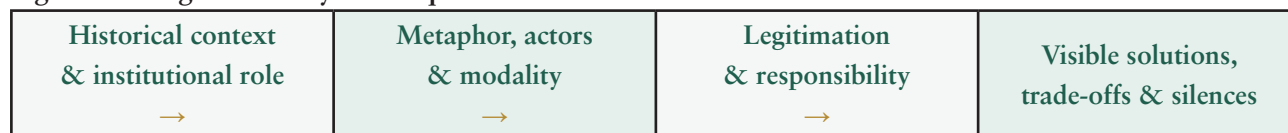
Legitimation follows van Leeuwen's four categories. Authorization includes leadership, Vision 2030, institutional mandates, international standards, and expert bodies. Moral evaluation includes responsibility, quality of life, future generations, stewardship, and collective duty. Rationalization includes quantified targets, investments, technical systems, efficiency, project functions, and anticipated benefits. Mythopoesis includes compressed stories of a green era, a shared journey, progress becoming tangible, and effort bearing fruit. Since one unit may perform several functions, the categories overlap.

Arabic itself adds an important analytical layer. The study attends not only to translated meanings but also to grammatical form, lexical roots, and the distribution of agency. The future prefix in قونس (we will lead), for example, fuses prediction with an explicit collective actor, whereas a passive construction such as متيس (the project will be implemented) foregrounds completion and backgrounds responsibility. Nominalizations such as لوتال (transition), قمدتسال (sustainability), and نيكمتال (enabling) can present complex political choices as stable policy objects. Repeated root families also create lexical cohesion: forms connected with ومن (growth), رضح (green), قاق (lead), and ققح (achieve) make progress sound cumulative across otherwise different genres. These features do not carry one fixed ideology, but they provide observable evidence

for asking who acts, how certain the future appears, and whether transition is presented as an open negotiation or an already organized programme.

The model can be summarized as a sequence: historical context and institutional role shape the available language; metaphor and actor representation frame the transition; modality calibrates certainty and obligation; legitimization supplies authority, reason, value, and story; and the resulting discourse foregrounds particular responsibilities and solutions. The final critical question is always comparative: what becomes less visible when one interpretation becomes dominant?

Figure 1. Integrated analytical sequence



4. Corpus and Method

The study uses a qualitative-dominant, corpus-assisted design. The source corpus consists of 15 publicly accessible Arabic pages or page clusters from four institutional settings: eight Saudi Green Initiative pages, two Public Investment Fund pages, three Saudi Aramco pages, and two Ministry of Energy pages. These sources were selected because they explicitly connect environmental action with economic diversification, energy transition, investment, infrastructure, industry, resource use, or quality of life. Dated texts cover 2021–2025. Undated institutional pages were accessed on 11 July 2026 and treated as current public-facing narratives rather than assigned a false publication date.

From the source pages, the researcher extracted 105 complete Arabic analytical units containing 804 whitespace-delimited Arabic or alphanumeric tokens. An analytical unit was a standalone heading, slogan, or complete clause that made an explicit claim about transition, sustainability, energy, environmental protection, investment, or economic change. Navigation labels, repeated menus, cookie notices, and purely logistical material were excluded. Long project or forum pages were not counted as equivalent to short slogans; instead, their relevant clauses were treated separately. This created a transparent micro-corpus suitable for close linguistic analysis.

The sampling is purposive and feature-oriented. It does not estimate the frequency of a metaphor across all Saudi government communication. Saudi Green Initiative material contributes 78 of the 105 units because the platform is the principal public hub for the national green narrative. PIF contributes 12 units, Aramco 11, and the Ministry of Energy four. This imbalance is analytically meaningful but also limits direct institutional comparison. Percentages therefore describe only the selected units, and all frequency tables report the denominator.

Genre was recorded because a homepage slogan, a forum report, a financing framework, an annual-report summary, and a project listing perform different communicative work. Slogans condense direction and value; reports provide retrospective proof; financing pages justify standards and investment mechanisms; and project listings privilege capacity, location, cost, and delivery. The analysis therefore does not treat every unit as rhetorically equivalent. Institutional comparison is based on patterned tendencies within these functions, not on a claim that one short headline has the same informational weight as a technical paragraph. This distinction is practical as well as theoretical: without it, the high frequency of visionary language on SGI pages could be mistaken for a national preference independent of genre, while the Ministry’s compressed project grammar could be misread as an absence of values rather than a consequence of document purpose.

Coding proceeded in four stages. First, each unit was assigned source, institution, date category, and genre. Second, metaphorically used language was identified through an adapted MIP/MIPVU procedure: the contextual meaning was compared with a more basic meaning, and the expression was retained when the contrast supported cross-domain mapping (Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen et al., 2010). Third, modal expressions were coded by function rather than by form alone. Fourth, each unit was examined for authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, mythopoesis, actor nomination, argumentation, and intensification or mitigation.

A hybrid codebook was used. Deductive categories came from the theoretical framework, while inductive subcategories were added during pilot reading. Closely related metaphor codes were then consolidated into

eight higher-order families. The same unit could receive more than one metaphor, modality, or legitimation code, so totals are overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. A phrase was not treated as a frame simply because it contained a keyword. It had to contribute to a coherent interpretation of problem, agency, direction, value, or solution.

The analysis followed two passes. The first coded the full micro-corpus and generated descriptive counts. The second returned to the source pages, checked the selected clause in context, reviewed ambiguous cases, and searched deliberately for counter-examples. The 2024 forum’s explicit discussion of energy security, cost, and sustainability, and Aramco’s “dual challenge,” were retained because they complicate a simple celebration narrative. No independent second coder was available. That is a limitation: the counts should be treated as a transparent analytical aid, not as mechanically objective facts. A journal submission should add independent coding of a substantial sample and report agreement with qualitative adjudication.

Arabic was analysed in the original. English translations are functional rather than literary and appear only for short illustrative excerpts. Exact quotations were kept brief, and the source-code inventory in Appendix A makes every example traceable. The study uses public institutional texts and no personal data. The ethical risk is therefore limited, and the study’s primary boundary is inferential: it analyses language, not audience effects, public opinion, policy effectiveness, or the truth of reported performance figures.

Table 1. Corpus composition

Institutional group	Source pages	Analytical units	Discursive role
Saudi Green Initiatives	8	78	Vision, targets, forums, progress, and public participation
Public Investment Fund	2	12	Green finance, diversification, standards, and longitudinal progress
Saudi Aramco	3	11	Corporate sustainability, operational capacity, and energy continuity
Ministry of Energy	2	4	Sector direction, project capacity, cost, and scheduled implementation
Total	15	105	804 tokens in the coded Arabic micro-corpus

Note. A unit may carry several codes. The counts in later tables therefore overlap. Source imbalance is reported rather than statistically corrected.

Table 2. Operational coding dimensions

Dimension	Main categories	Decision question
Metaphor	Journey; construction; growth; leadership/era; balance/system; stewardship; threat	What familiar source domain gives the transition shape?
Modality	Obligation; commitment; future certainty; aspiration; necessity; capacity	How strongly is an action required, intended, possible, or predicted?
Legitimation	Authorization; moral evaluation; rationalization; mythopoesis	Why is the actor, goal, or solution presented as acceptable?
DHA strategy	Nomination; predication; argumentation; perspectivation; intensification/mitigation	Who acts, how are actors evaluated, and which warrants connect problem to remedy?
Critical boundary	Agency; trade-off; cost; labour; consumption; uncertainty; participation	What is foregrounded, and what remains weak or absent?

5. Findings

The corpus is coherent enough to support an integrated narrative, yet institutional roles produce meaningful differences. SGI language is visionary, participatory, and morally evaluative. PIF language is catalytic, investment-

oriented, and standards-based. Ministry language is compressed and technical. Aramco's language emphasizes operational capability and continuity of energy provision. Across these differences, metaphor gives the transition shape, modality gives it force, and legitimation gives it reasons.

5.1 Historical Sequence: Mobilization, Proof, and Socialization

The dated material suggests three discursive stages, although the sample is too uneven for a strict statistical time series. The launch stage is visible in 2021–2022 through phrases that announce an era, establish leadership, and move ambition into action. The narrative function is mobilization: it creates a historical threshold and gives the programme a shared destination. Authorization is strong because the new initiative is presented as nationally led and regionally significant.

The implementation-and-proof stage is clearest in 2023–2024. PIF annual-report summaries shift from “driving the wheel of economic transformation” to “tangible progress,” continued growth, and a “pioneering course.” SGI forum reports add investment totals, project capacities, tree numbers, restored land, protected areas, memoranda, and target years. The language of progress becomes more measurable. Numbers act as milestones along the previously announced journey.

The socialization stage appears strongly in the 2025 SGI Day text. Environmental action is no longer represented only as large infrastructure. It is linked to food waste, water, electricity, children, households, and visible everyday practices. The transition becomes a culture and a “collective responsibility.” This broadens participation, but it also changes the scale of responsibility: individual behaviour becomes highly visible while investment and system design remain controlled by institutions.

The undated pages keep all three stages present at once. They continue to announce a green future, list current achievements, and invite participation. The result is not a linear replacement of one vocabulary by another. It is accumulation. Launch language supplies purpose, measurement language supplies credibility, and participation language supplies social normality.

5.2 Metaphor: Direction, Design, Growth, and Balance

Journey and transition form the largest metaphor family, appearing in 46 of 105 units (43.8%). The family includes road, journey, course, steps, pace, movement, transformation, and destination. Its strength lies in its flexibility. It can describe a long-term national pathway, a specific energy transition, an institutional strategy, or a project milestone. It also makes change appear orderly: a journey can be accelerated, monitored, and divided into stages without suggesting that the whole system must be abandoned at once.

The first example compresses governance into a spatial action. Someone must prepare the road, while the public is invited to imagine a common future at its end.

مادتسم لبق تسم وحن قيرظلا دي همت [SGI-H]

“Paving the way toward a sustainable future” The institution prepares the route and defines the destination.

The second expression adds measurement. A roadmap implies stages, instruments, and accountability, but it also presumes that the destination has already been agreed. In DHA terms, the institution is not merely describing movement; it is authorizing the route and naturalizing its end point.

يرفصلا داي حل افده قيقحت وحن قما دتسم قيرط قطراخ [SGI-A]

“A sustainable roadmap toward net zero” The future is organized as a sequence of governable milestones.

Construction and materialization are the second largest family, present in 24 units (22.9%). Future conditions are built, foundations are laid, impacts are made, goals become tangible, and initiatives draw the features of what comes next. This vocabulary gives institutional agency a material quality. Policy is not imagined as discussion but as production. It is particularly compatible with investment and infrastructure because abstract ambitions can be represented as objects that expert organizations are able to design and deliver.

Greening, growth, and life occur in 20 units (19.0%). These expressions connect economic transition

with renewal rather than restriction. The desert becomes an oasis, impact grows, initiatives flower, and effort bears fruit. Such language humanizes policy by making benefits vivid and hopeful. It also creates a naturalized temporal sequence: planting comes before harvest, so present costs can be interpreted as necessary preparation for future gain.

ادرامث يتوت تادب قل وذبملا يعاسملا [SGI-P]

“The efforts have begun to bear fruit” Early outputs are narrated as the natural yield of earlier work.

Leadership and new-era expressions appear in 14 units (13.3%). They nominate Saudi Arabia and its institutions as agents rather than followers. “We will lead the coming green era” does two things simultaneously: it declares that a historical phase is emerging and assigns national leadership over that phase. The formulation is confident and memorable, but it also compresses disagreement. If a new era has already begun, objections can appear to belong to the past rather than to a legitimate debate about pace or design.

قمداقلا عارضخا قبقحل دوقنس [SGI-V]

“We will lead the coming green era” Temporal change and political agency are fused in one promise.

System, balance, and coordination appear in 13 units (12.4%). The “umbrella” integrates multiple ministries and sectors; circular-carbon language treats emissions as flows to be reduced, reused, recycled, and removed, while the energy trilemma frames security, cost, and sustainability as variables to be balanced. These metaphors acknowledge complexity more directly than the journey frame. Their critical limit is managerialism: conflict is translated into a coordination problem that capable experts can solve.

Protection and stewardship appear in 11 units (10.5%). Nature is a national wealth, future generations must be protected, and environmental action provides safety and continuity. This family supplies moral depth to the economic story. The transition is not justified only by growth; it becomes a duty of care. Threat and struggle expressions are much less common, appearing in five units. Their relative marginality is significant. The corpus prefers a confident developmental story to a crisis narrative, even when it mentions urgent climate effects.

Taken together, the metaphor system constructs an optimistic division of labour. Institutions pave, build, drive, coordinate, and lead. Society travels, participates, and eventually shares the harvest. That arrangement is coherent and easy to understand. It is also asymmetrical: the route is represented as collectively beneficial, but the grammar rarely shows ordinary people helping to choose its direction.

Table 3. Metaphor-family distribution in the selected units

Metaphor family	Units	Share of 105 units
Journey / transition	46	43.8%
Construction / materialization	24	22.9%
Greening / growth / life	20	19.0%
Leadership / new era	14	13.3%
System / balance / coordination	13	12.4%
Protection / stewardship	11	10.5%
Threat / struggle	5	4.8%
Nature / identity	1	1.0%

Note. Families overlap because one clause may combine, for example, journey and greening metaphors.

5.3 Modality: Managed Certainty

Modality converts metaphorical direction into different degrees of commitment. Commitment and obligation occur in 15 units (14.3%). Forms such as مزتلت (commits), نومزاع (are determined), بجي (must/should), and قناع ىلع عقي (rests on the responsibility of) present action as duty. This is the strongest modal layer. It is often attached to targets, institutional roles, or principles that integrate climate action with energy security and prosperity.

مَامْتَهَالَا نَم رِدْقَلَا سَفَنب يِدَا صَتَقَالَا رَاهِدْزَالَاو قَقَا طَلَا نَم أَوْ يَخَانْمَلَا لِمَعَلَا يَظْحِي نَأ بَجِي [SGI-H]

“Climate action, energy security, and economic prosperity must receive equal attention” Obligation turns policy balance into a normative requirement.

Future certainty and continuity also occur in 15 units (14.3%). Future prefixes, “will continue,” “is scheduled,” and “will be able” connect current action to anticipated outcomes. The grammar makes the future feel administratively reachable. It turns a target into the next point in a sequence rather than an open possibility. This is particularly visible when future forms are placed beside project capacities or dates.

Intention and aspiration appear in 10 units (9.5%). Verbs such as *يَعْسِتْ* (seeks), *فَدَمَتْ* (aims), and *حَمَطَتْ* (aspires) are less binding than formal commitments, yet they are not simply weak. They are often surrounded by strong authorization, numbers, or evaluative terms. The result is calibrated ambition: the institution can state an expansive direction while retaining flexibility about implementation.

Necessity and urgency appear in seven units, while capacity and enabling appear in six. “Pressing need” creates a reason for action; “can,” “enable,” and “sufficient capacity” create confidence that action is possible. The combination produces managed certainty. The discourse is neither fully categorical nor openly uncertain. Strong commitments define the direction, while aspiration and capacity language manages the technical and temporal contingencies.

Passive future forms deserve special attention. The Ministry of Energy’s “the project will be implemented” makes planning sound orderly but suppresses the actor. The sentence foregrounds completion and location, not responsibility or uncertainty. By contrast, active forms such as “the Kingdom commits” and “the Fund develops” make agency explicit. This grammatical difference reflects institutional genre: project listings privilege deliverables, while strategy pages privilege leadership.

لِصَاوَنَسْ اِنْنَأَبْ أَمَامْتْ قَثْنْ [SGI-FC24]

“We are fully confident that we will continue” Epistemic certainty is combined with a future commitment.

Epistemic intensification further manages trust. The forum statement “we are fully confident that we will continue” combines certainty, collective voice, and future action. Confidence itself becomes evidence. A critical reading does not assume that the confidence is false. It asks what additional information would allow readers to evaluate it: baselines, intermediate milestones, implementation risks, and the conditions under which the prediction might change.

5.4 Legitimation: Authority, Evidence, Value, and Story

Rationalization is the most frequent legitimation strategy, present in 59 units (56.2%). The discourse repeatedly explains why action is useful, workable, efficient, or economically valuable. Project pages provide capacities, locations, investment values, and purchase costs. SGI pages provide target years, protected-area proportions, tree numbers, renewable-energy capacity, and investment totals. PIF connects green finance with economic diversification and international standards. These details make the narrative concrete and distinguish it from purely aspirational branding.

Quantification, however, is selective. A megawatt figure says something important about capacity, but not by itself about grid reliability, lifecycle emissions, labour conditions, land use, or affordability. A tree count does not automatically communicate survival, biodiversity value, or water demand. An investment total does not show how benefits and costs are distributed. Numbers strengthen accountability only when the reader can understand their baseline, method, time frame, and limitations.

Authorization appears in 32 units (30.5%). The principal authorities are national leadership, Vision 2030, ministries, national committees, the sovereign wealth fund, recognized experts, international forums, and external standards. PIF’s green-finance page is a clear example: the framework is legitimized not only by national goals but also by international principles and independent assessment. Authorization therefore travels in two directions. It is national, through political mandate, and transnational, through standards and expert verification.

Moral evaluation appears in 33 units (31.4%). Quality of life, future generations, environmental protection, collective responsibility, and harmony with nature give the transition ethical meaning. The language does not ask the public to support a policy only because it is profitable. It presents support as responsible care for people and place. The moral frame is strongest when environmental action is connected to children, biodiversity, food waste, water, and a livable future.

Mythopoesis appears in 32 units (30.5%). The recurring story has a recognizable plot: a serious challenge is acknowledged; national leadership recognizes it; institutions coordinate and innovate; progress becomes tangible; and society reaches a greener, more prosperous future. Short formulations such as “from ambition to action,” “the green era,” and “effort has begun to bear fruit” compress this plot into memorable language. The story is persuasive because it links present action to an intelligible future.

Aramco provides an important contrastive case. It explicitly names a “dual challenge”: meeting growing energy needs while managing emissions. The accompanying efficiency argument—doing more with less—legitimizes continuity through improved performance. This is more candid about tension than a simple replacement story. Yet it also channels the answer toward technology and management. Questions about the level and distribution of demand remain less central.

جودزم دحت [ARAM-C]

“A *dual challenge*” The text acknowledges tension before proposing an efficiency response.

The 2024 SGI Forum offers a related counter-pattern by naming security, cost, and sustainability together and reporting a practical approach that combines oil and gas with renewable energy. This passage makes the transition’s continuity explicit. Green transition is not narrated as the abrupt removal of hydrocarbons, but as a reconfiguration of an energy system under multiple constraints. The rhetorical effect is to move the central question from whether existing energy sources should remain to how their emissions, efficiency, and relationship to new capacity should be managed.

Table 4. Modality and legitimation in the selected units

Analytical layer	Category	Units	Share
Modality	Commitment / obligation	15	14.3%
Modality	Future certainty / continuity	15	14.3%
Modality	Intention / aspiration	10	9.5%
Modality	Necessity / urgency	7	6.7%
Modality	Capacity / enabling	6	5.7%
Legitimation	Rationalization	59	56.2%
Legitimation	Moral evaluation	33	31.4%
Legitimation	Mythopoesis	32	30.5%
Legitimation	Authorization	32	30.5%

Note. The two layers are not directly comparable and all categories overlap. Presence means that the category was evidenced at least once in the unit.

5.5 The Human Place in the Transition

A humanized analysis asks where people appear in the grammar, not only whether the word “people” is present. The corpus regularly mentions quality of life, future generations, jobs, women, youth, communities, citizens, and social participation. These references matter. They prevent the green economy from becoming a closed conversation among engineers, financiers, and institutions. The 2025 SGI Day text is especially concrete: it connects sustainability to food waste, saving water and electricity, family practices, children, and public commitments.

ةي عامجال ةيلوؤسجال [SGI-D25]

“*Collective responsibility*” The moral frame moves from institutions toward everyday practice.

Yet human roles are not distributed equally. Institutional actors are usually grammatical agents: they lead, launch, invest, develop, enable, protect, and measure. People are more often beneficiaries of a better quality of life, new opportunities, cleaner electricity, or a protected environment. When citizens become active, their role is usually to cooperate, become aware, adopt sustainable habits, or join an existing programme. Deliberative agency—helping to decide priorities, pace, compensation, or acceptable trade-offs—is much less visible.

This distinction is important for SDG 8 and SDG 12. SDG 8 includes decent work, labour rights, and inclusive employment, not only growth and sector creation. SDG 12 includes consumption, material footprint, waste, and resource efficiency, not only cleaner production. The corpus strongly foregrounds infrastructure, investment, innovation, national capability, and supply. It gives less sustained attention to retraining, employment quality, regional inequality, household affordability, rebound effects, or the social distribution of environmental costs. The point is not that every institutional webpage should contain a complete social-impact assessment. Different genres have different tasks. The critical pattern emerges across the corpus: when the same absences recur, they mark the limits of the public narrative. A more human-centred transition discourse would keep the existing language of ambition but add clearer answers to four questions: Who gains and who bears the cost? Which workers and regions need support? How can citizens question or shape implementation? How will institutions report uncertainty and correction when targets change?

6. Discussion

The findings show that metaphor, modality, and legitimation operate as one discursive system. Metaphor supplies an intuitive model: the transition is a road into a green era, built and accelerated by capable institutions. Modality controls the pressure of that model: some actions are necessary and committed, others are intended, scheduled, possible, or confidently predicted. Legitimation explains why the direction should be trusted: it carries leadership authority, technical rationality, quantified evidence, economic opportunity, and moral responsibility. This system is particularly suited to the Saudi context because it reconciles transition with continuity. The corpus rarely frames environmental change as a rejection of the country's established energy role. Circular-carbon management, renewable energy, hydrogen, efficiency, carbon capture, green finance, and biodiversity protection are placed inside a diversified system. The public narrative therefore resembles ecological modernization: existing institutional capacity is reoriented toward lower-impact growth rather than displaced by a wholly new order. That helps explain why journey and construction metaphors are more common than war or collapse metaphors.

Institutional differences support this broader narrative. SGI supplies the moral horizon and shared destination. PIF converts transition into investment, sector creation, standards, and value. The Ministry of Energy turns it into capacities, sites, costs, and scheduled delivery. Aramco frames it through operational expertise and the dual task of energy provision and emissions management. No single source contains the whole story. Intertextually, the sources divide communicative labour: vision, finance, implementation, and continuity reinforce one another.

The historical sequence also matters. Launch discourse needs confidence and memorable direction. Implementation discourse needs milestones and technical evidence. Socialization discourse needs everyday roles and recognizable practices. The selected Saudi texts show this accumulation. Their strength is consistency: repeated language allows audiences to connect a protected habitat, a solar plant, a financing framework, and a household conservation campaign to the same national future. Their risk is that coherence can become closure. A well-organized story may make genuine uncertainty or conflict appear as a temporary communication problem rather than a substantive political choice.

The study's SDG reading makes that tension clearer. Discursive alignment with SDG 9 is strong because infrastructure, innovation, and industrial capability are highly visible. Alignment with SDG 13 is also strong because climate action is integrated into national planning and long-term targets. SDG 8 is represented through diversification, jobs, and growth, but its decent-work dimension is thinner. SDG 12 is present through efficiency, circularity, waste, and conservation, yet consumption and material demand remain less central than cleaner supply. This does not prove weak policy performance. It identifies an imbalance in public emphasis.

A practical communication response should not discard the successful journey, growth, or leadership frames. They make a complex programme understandable and motivating. They should be complemented. A just-

transition frame would name workers, skills, protection, and regional opportunity. A stewardship-and-limits frame would make water, land, material use, and ecological trade-offs visible. A participation frame would present communities not only as audiences or behavioural partners but also as sources of knowledge and legitimate disagreement. An accountability frame would pair long-range targets with consistent baselines, intermediate milestones, uncertainty ranges, and explanations of corrective action.

Humanization is most persuasive when it moves beyond adding benevolent nouns. References to families, youth, women, jobs, and future generations bring social value into the text, but a fully humanized transition also needs verbs that give people meaningful agency. There is a difference between citizens who are protected, informed, or encouraged to conserve and citizens who contribute knowledge, question priorities, negotiate local impacts, or evaluate outcomes. The corpus is much stronger in the first pattern. This does not cancel its genuine attention to quality of life; it shows where that attention can mature. Public communication could retain a unified national direction while opening carefully designed spaces for local evidence, worker experience, household cost, and feedback on implementation. In linguistic terms, the shift would be visible in more active human subjects, more reported voices, and more explicit acknowledgement of conditionality and disagreement. The article also offers a methodological lesson. Small Arabic corpora can produce rigorous insight when the unit of analysis, coding rules, source imbalance, and inferential limits are explicit. Counts alone would have missed the distinction between an active commitment and a passive future, or between a journey that invites participation and a journey whose route is already fixed. Close reading alone might have overstated memorable phrases without showing their recurrence. The corpus-assisted DHA approach is strongest when the two forms of evidence correct one another.

Several limitations remain. The corpus is institutional and feature-oriented; it does not represent Saudi public opinion. It excludes citizen social media, independent commentary, interviews, and audience reception. The source genres are unequal, and most strategic pages are undated. Coding was conducted by one researcher, so an independent reliability measure is absent. The study also analyses Arabic only and cannot determine whether English versions position global investors or climate audiences differently. Future research should add bilingual comparison, archived longitudinal data, worker and household interviews, and reception studies that test whether the dominant metaphors are accepted, adapted, or resisted.

Practical communication priorities

Keep the accessible journey and growth language, but pair it with four complementary frames: just transition (workers and skills), stewardship and limits (resources and trade-offs), participation (citizens as knowledge-holders), and accountability (baselines, milestones, uncertainty, and correction).

7. Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's green economic transition is made publicly intelligible through a disciplined language of movement, construction, growth, leadership, protection, and balance. Journey metaphors give change a route; construction metaphors give institutions the role of designers; growth metaphors promise renewal; and leadership metaphors place national actors at the centre of a new era. Modal choices combine firm obligation with flexible aspiration and future confidence. Legitimation joins authority, numbers, technology, economic benefit, moral responsibility, and a cumulative story of progress.

The result is an effective narrative of managed continuity. Climate action, energy security, and economic diversification are not presented as rival projects but as priorities that capable institutions can coordinate. The narrative is strengthened by real project language and measurable targets. It is also humanized through quality of life, jobs, future generations, and collective responsibility.

Its principal limitation is not a lack of optimism but a narrow distribution of agency. Institutions largely design and drive the transition; citizens are invited to benefit, support, conserve, and participate within the established path. A more credible next phase would make trade-offs, affordability, labour adjustment, consumption, and uncertainty more explicit. It would show not only where the road leads, but who helps choose it, who carries its costs, and how progress can be questioned and corrected. Such language would not weaken national ambition. It would make the transition more accountable, more inclusive, and more fully human.

Declarations

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Ethics: The study used public institutional webpages and did not collect personal data or reproduce private communication.

Data availability: Appendix A provides the source inventory and Appendix B provides representative coded excerpts. The complete coding sheet should be archived by the author before submission.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Corpus Inventory

The table identifies the 15 public Arabic source pages and the number of clause- or headline-level units extracted from each. Counts are not page word counts.

Table A1. Source pages and analytical units

Code	Institution	Date	Source title	Units
SGI-H	Saudi Green Initiatives	n.d.	Homepage	10
SGI-A	Saudi Green Initiatives	n.d.	About the Saudi Green Initiative	18
SGI-V	Saudi Green Initiatives	n.d.	Saudi climate vision	10
SGI-C	Saudi Green Initiatives	n.d.	Target: reduce carbon emissions	11
SGI-P	Saudi Green Initiatives	n.d.	Target: protect land and sea	8
SGI-D25	Saudi Green Initiatives	2025	SGI Day 2025	8
SGI-FL24	Saudi Green Initiatives	2024	Saudi Arabia advances climate action at SGI Forum 2024	7
SGI-FC24	Saudi Green Initiatives	2024	Fourth SGI Forum: progress across targets	6
PIF-GF	Public Investment Fund	n.d.	Green Finance Framework	6
PIF-AR	Public Investment Fund	2021–2024	Annual Reports landing page	6
ARAM-H	Saudi Aramco	n.d.	Arabic homepage	4
ARAM-S	Saudi Aramco	n.d.	Sustainability	5
ARAM-C	Saudi Aramco	n.d.	Climate and energy	2
MOE-H	Ministry of Energy	n.d.	Arabic homepage	2
MOE-P	Ministry of Energy	2024	Ministry projects	2

Appendix B. Representative Arabic Evidence

The examples below are intentionally short. They illustrate the analytical range without reproducing full webpages. Translations prioritize function and readability.

Table B1. Selected Arabic expressions, translations, and codes

Source	Arabic expression	Functional translation	Metaphor / feature	Modal or legitimation function
SGI-H	تبقى حل دوقن قمدال اراضخل	We will lead the coming green era	leadership/era	future certainty + authorization
SGI-H	وحن قيرطلا ديهمت مادتسم لبق تسم	Paving the way toward a sustainable future	journey/construction	mythopoesis
SGI-H	يظحي نأ بجي نمأو يخانملا لمعل رامدزال او قاطلا سفن ب يداصتقالا مامت هالا نم ردقلا	Climate action, energy security, and prosperity must receive equal attention	balance	obligation + rationalization
SGI-A	نكل مملاب يضمن تبقى حل وحن قمدال اراضخل	We move the Kingdom toward the coming green era	journey/era	mythopoesis
SGI-A	ارحصلا لي وحت اراضخ عا وىل	Transforming the desert into a green oasis	greening/transformation	moral evaluation
SGI-A	دحاو ظلم تحت	Under one umbrella	coordination/container	authorization
SGI-V	فطقنو ادوقن أيوس امرا م	We lead it and harvest its fruits together	leadership/growth	shared-benefit story
SGI-V	يدصتلا قابس يخانملا ري غتل	The race to confront climate change	race/threat	urgency story
SGI-C	قل جر عيرست رضخالا لاق تنالا	Accelerating the green-transition journey	journey	rationalization
SGI-C	وحن قيرطلا ديهمت داي حل قيقحت يرفصل	Paving the way toward net zero	journey/construction	rationalization + story
SGI-C	نكل ممل مزتلت نم 50% دي لوتب ةيئابرهكلا قاطلا نددجتم رداصم نم	The Kingdom commits to generating 50% of electricity from renewables	target	commitment + rationalization
SGI-P	قورث يلع ظاف حل نكل ممل	Preserving the Kingdom's wealth	stewardship/wealth	moral evaluation
SGI-P	قل وذبملا يعاسملا امرا م يتوت تأدب	The efforts have begun to bear fruit	growth/harvest	mythopoesis
SGI-D25	ةي عام جلا ةيلوؤسملا	Collective responsibility	moral community	moral evaluation
SGI-D25	ري يغتلا قل جع عفد مادتسملا	Driving the wheel of sustainable change	movement/mechanism	mythopoesis
SGI-FL24	ردابن انت عي بطب	Initiative is in our nature	nature/identity	moral identity story
SGI-FL24	نكل ممل يضمن قتب باث ي طخب	The Kingdom advances with steady steps	journey	continuity
SGI-FC24	اننأب أمامت قثن لصاونس	We are fully confident that we will continue	confidence	future certainty

Source	Arabic expression	Functional translation	Metaphor / feature	Modal or legitimation function
SGI-FC24	عقل كفتل او نملال قم ادتسالاو	Security, cost, and sustainability	balance	rationalization
PIF-GF	عيون ت عيرست يل حمل ا داصتقالا	Accelerating diversification of the local economy	movement	economic rationalization
PIF-GF	راطا قفاوتي عم رضخالا ليومتل ةيلودلا ري ياعملا	The green-finance framework aligns with international standards	standards	authorization
PIF-AR	لوح تال قلع ع عفد ي داصتقالا	Driving the wheel of economic transformation	mechanism/transition	progress story
ARAM-H	رثكأ لبقتسم مسر ع يمل جلل أ قارش	Drawing a brighter future for everyone	design/light	moral story
ARAM-S	قم ادتسالا يس اسأ كرحم اهتيجي تارتسالا	Sustainability is a core engine of its strategy	engine	rationalization
ARAM-C	ديزلما زاجن ليل قلا مادختساب	Achieving more with less	efficiency/balance	rationalization
MOE-H	وحن هتريسم ت افدهتسم قيقحت ةيؤر 2030	Its course toward achieving Vision 2030 targets	journey	authorization
MOE-P	ذيفنت متيس عورش ملا	The project will be implemented	none	passive future

Appendix C. Compact Codebook

Code	Typical indicators	Decision rule
Journey / transition	road, journey, course, step, pace, move, transformation	The policy process is organized as movement toward a destination.
Construction / materialization	build, draw, lay a foundation, create impact, make tangible	Institutions are positioned as designers and producers of the future.
Greening / growth / life	green, grow, fruit, flower, life, oasis	Transition is evaluated as renewal, life, or natural development.
Leadership / era	lead, pioneering, new era	Historical change is joined to national or institutional agency.
Modality	must, commit, seek, aim, will, can, scheduled	The text calibrates obligation, intention, certainty, or capacity.
Authorization	leadership, Vision 2030, ministry, expert, standard	Legitimacy comes from recognized authority or expertise.
Moral evaluation	future generations, quality of life, responsibility, protection	Legitimacy comes from values and ethical duty.
Rationalization	target, number, efficiency, investment, function, consequence	Legitimacy comes from evidence, purpose, or technical reasoning.
Mythopoesis	green era, journey, progress, harvest, shared future	Legitimacy comes from a narrative of challenge, action, and success.