

Arran Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015. viii + 210 pp. US\$39 (pbk), ISBN 0415837839.

**Reviewed by:** Emma Franklin, *Department of Linguistics and English Language, Lancaster University, UK*

This monograph from Arran Stibbe takes a specific and highly practical approach to ecological discourse analysis. It is not an overview of the diverse field of ecolinguistics, nor is it a prescriptive manual on how ecolinguistics ought to be done; rather, it is a demonstration of how ecolinguistic analysis might be carried out, and indeed has been carried out by the author to powerful effect. Stibbe brings together a wide range of analytical approaches and concepts into a proposed framework, and draws on an eclectic collection of texts to demonstrate the validity – and necessity – of ecolinguistic analysis. For the sake of our planet and all life dependent on it, we are urged to critically engage with the *stories we live by*. These are, in the style of Lakoff and Johnson, “stories in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture” (p. 16).

The introductory chapter makes clear several things: the reasons for doing ecolinguistics; what ecolinguistics is, or can be; the aims and purpose of the book; the author’s own stance and approach to ecolinguistics; and the book’s *ecosophy*. The concept of an *ecosophy* (or ‘ecological philosophy’) is taken from Naess (1995) and is a set of philosophical principles to be decided by the analyst and then adhered to throughout the analytical process. In taking this approach, Stibbe openly states the moral stance he takes in his analyses and gives a brief explanation for it. His *ecosophy* is summarised as *Living!*, and places emphasis on the wellbeing of all species, the value of living, care and empathy towards others, providing a good quality of life for the future, keeping within environmental limits, establishing greater parity in society, and increasing resilience for continued survival. It is stressed, however, that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ *ecosophy*, and that his is not necessarily the most suitable for all ecolinguistic investigations.

Aside from its introduction and conclusion, the book consists of eight main chapters, each one focusing on one of the following types of ‘story’: *ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, and salience*. Stories arise from the use of various linguistic (and sometimes visual) features in texts, as demonstrated in each chapter. For example, *evaluations* are “stories in people’s minds about whether an area of life is good or bad”, and *appraisal patterns* are “clusters of linguistic features which come together to represent an area of life as good or bad” (p. 84). In each chapter, stories are identified and then judged against the book’s *ecosophy*. If they are found to go against the *ecosophy*, i.e. to be *destructive*, they are resisted; if they are in line with it, i.e. are *beneficial*, they are promoted. Texts are taken from a wide range of genres, from economics textbooks and ecology reports to Japanese poetry, advertisements and lifestyle magazines. In many cases, the beneficial story needed to counter a destructive one is found in the discourse of a totally different genre of writing.

Chapter 2, ‘Ideologies and Discourse’, lays the foundations for the chapters that follow. For Stibbe, *ideologies* are stories which manifest in *discourse*, and a critical linguistic analysis involves the uncovering of those stories by observing the relevant linguistic features. This chapter appears to attempt a kind of step-by-step guide for linguistic analysis, and draws on a range of critical discourse analysis literature to produce a comprehensive list of features to be analysed. Predictably, however, this results in a large and diverse set of features for the analyst to consider, including modality, semantic relations, transitivity, metaphor, intertextuality, clause relations, and others. The end result is not so much a guide for linguistic analysis as a set of potentially useful suggestions or starting points; this criticism is acknowledged, however, in the book’s concluding chapter. Stibbe’s example analysis, using discourse from neoclassical economics textbooks, leads to convincing and eye-opening findings, and also marks the beginning of a persistent ‘ecology vs. economy’ theme which features several times throughout the book.

The next two chapters cover *frames* and *metaphors*, which overlap considerably but merit separate chapters. Stibbe establishes frames in ecology reports such as NATURE IS A RESOURCE, and finds examples of resistance to this frame in nature writing. Metaphors include CLIMATE CHANGE IS A TIME BOMB, NATURE IS A COMPETITION, and THE EARTH IS A SPACESHIP, all of which are shown to have potentially damaging consequences for the planet if, as is increasingly argued, metaphors play a role in our thought and behaviour patterns. A striking example of the real-world effects of metaphor are seen in the case of CORPORATION IS A PERSON, a conceptualisation that has even been accepted within the US legal system, and which allows corporations to claim the benefits of legal personhood in US court cases. Stibbe also demonstrates, however, that the exposing of a metaphor opens it up to resistance, as is now being seen in the ‘Occupy’ social justice movement.

‘Evaluations and Appraisal Patterns’ explores pervasive and culturally ingrained ideas (or stories) such as PROFITS ARE GOOD and DARK IS BAD, and demonstrates the importance of questioning these cultural evaluations rather than uncritically accepting them. ‘Identities’ exposes the ways in which texts, particularly advertising texts, can construct and impose identities, encouraging readers to identify with those stories and engage in ecologically damaging behaviours. Counter-discourses promote more ecologically beneficial stories by, for example, placing humans in co-hyponymic relations with other members of the natural world, rather than perpetuating the notion (or story) of human exceptionalism. ‘Convictions and Facticity Patterns’ relates, similarly, to the persuasive powers of texts and the ways in which assertions can be presented as fact, and the implications this might have on our planet. For example, the *facticity patterns* in discourse surrounding climate change have an impact on the *convictions* people have in their minds, which could lead either to ecologically beneficial action or to the adoption or continuation of ecologically harmful practices as a result.

The final two of the eight main chapters, ‘Erasure’ and ‘Salience and Re-minding’, represent “two sides of the same coin” (p. 188). *Erasure* is not so much a reiteration of Stibbe’s previous book (2012), *Animals Erased*, as a fresh look at the latent ideologies in texts which convey the idea that something is unimportant or irrelevant. It concerns not only the erasure of animals and nature from anthropocentric texts, but also the erasure of humans from depictions of the natural world. *Salience*, on the other hand, is the act of bringing something to the fore, whether linguistically or visually, to create a sense of importance and worthiness. That the book should end on this more affirmative note is characteristic of Stibbe’s consistently positive approach, and sets it apart from the more pessimistic and radically ecocentric works in ecology and related fields. His style of discourse analysis is also a positive one, in that it is not merely critical of problematic discourses but also seeks alternative ones. *Ecolinguistics* is, in line with its ecosophy, a celebration of all life on Earth; it promotes nature without condemning the human, and encourages the reader to think more critically about humans and the more-than-human world.

Above all, the book is a call to action: *what can linguistics do for our planet?* Stibbe’s conclusions are modest, but his analyses demonstrate the potential for highly illuminating investigations into everyday discourse from an ecological perspective. He calls on a wide range of potential users, linguists or otherwise, though some background knowledge in linguistic theory will arguably be required in order to carry out analyses as sophisticated as those presented in this book. The framework proposed here, Stibbe adds, is not definitive, but is meant as a helpful starting point for those building or adapting a framework of their own. While this approach is new in that it combines analytical methods in a novel way, its grounding is in tried-and-tested discourse analysis models which have been – for want of a less corporate word – rebranded for ecolinguistic purposes (recycled, perhaps). The use of a moral ecosophy and the eclectic approach to data and methods might be criticised as subjective and arbitrary, but in the current climate of ‘objective’, impersonal, big-data

linguistics, a more personal, reflective and (critically) subjective approach such as this is a refreshing one.

*Ecolinguistics* is sensitively written, cogently argued, and invaluable to all discourse analysts and critical ecologists. Given the urgency of the crisis we are facing, this book is not so much timely as overdue.

### **References**

Naess A (1995) The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary. In: Drengson A and Inoue Y (eds) *The deep ecology movement: An introductory anthology*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, pp. 3-10.

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