Book review

An eco-discourse analyst and his stories: an ecolinguist's duet reviewed

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1. Arran Stibbe as an eco-discourse analyst

Dr. Arran Stibbe, the founder of the Ecolinguistics Association (www.ecoling.net) provides a significant platform for the academic communication among ecolinguists all over the world. Due to his specific contribution to ecological discourse (eco-discourse hereafter) analysis theory, I would rather label him as an eco-discourse analyst instead of a general ecolinguist. His specialization in ecological discourse analysis does not occur in a vacuum. And this notable article "An ecolinguistic approach to critical discourse studies" (2014) describes ecological discourse analysis within a critical framework. Among his specific publications, two monographs stand out: *Animals Erased: Discourse, Ecology, and Reconnection with the Natural World* (2012) (*Animals Erased* hereafter) and *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live by* (2015) (*Ecolinguistics* hereafter). Both of them deal with the interrelationship between languages, discourse in particular, ecology, the environment, and the ecosophy of ecolinguistics. The environment here, according to Stibbe, has two important senses: the natural environment in *Animals Erased*, and the social and natural environment in *Ecolinguistics*. Therefore, those two monographs show the gradual development of Stibbe's eco-discourse analysis theory and his theoretical trajectories from critical discourse to both positive and critical eco-discourse. Given that, those two monographs can be seen as the author's duet in that he plays such an ecological duet by two significant stories—the animal story and the human story with one theme of ecological harmony between human beings, non-human life forms, nature and the society. All those ideas of eco-discourse analysis are presented thoroughly in this recently published book, *Ecolinguistics*. Therefore, the purpose of this review is three-fold: first, it presents a critical and comprehensive overview of *Ecolinguistics*. Second, it offers a systematical review of Stibbe's central tenets on eco-discourse analysis, namely his views of language, ecology, and ecosophy, based on the two monographs. Given that, it further illustrates the implications for the future development of ecolinguistics.

  Ecolinguistics is a reader-friendly 210-page-in-length book, which is nicely designed and clearly structured. It includes 10 chapters, plus Contents, Acknowledgements, Appendix, Glossary, and Index. The title on the

cover is quite eye-catching and thought-provoking. With the background of two trees, "Eco" in the title is printed in green and indicates the "colorful green ideas" (Fill, 2002). And "linguistics" is printed in black to serve as the cautious function of reminding humans to identify three dominant types of discourse, namely, destructive discourse, ambivalent discourse, and beneficial discourse. Three key words below, 'language', 'ecology' and 'stories' not only suggest what the book is going to discuss, but also represent three core concepts in the current ecolinguistics proper. The table of contents covers the subtitles in each chapter, which makes it easier for readers to find the main chapter headings and the case studies. The Appendix and Index at the end of the book are accurate and broad insomuch that readers can have easy access to a diverse array of sources of data the author analyses and the topics covered in the book. The glossary at the end of the book integrates all the linguistic terms in the text and defines them in plain language, all accessible to not only linguists and ecolinguists, but also to other professionals (e.g. environmentalists, activists, sociologists, and psychologists), who have a new ecological awakening.

2. Summary of *Ecolinguistics*

The book comprises ten chapters: Introduction (Chapter 1), 8 stories (Chapter 2-9), and a Conclusion (Chapter 10). **Chapter 1** offers the central ideas of the book with 7 subtitles. The chapter starts with Ben Okri and Charles Eisenstein's interpretations of 'stories', with a brief introduction of the role of the book and also one key premise of the book. Then the chapter moves to the detailed account of 'the stories we live by'. The author claims that different from the stories in the narrative sense, "the stories we live by" refers to "stories in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture" (Stibbe, 2015: 6). Accordingly, these stories are important in that they have a profound influence on how people act in the world, either positively or negatively. Afterwards the chapter deals with "the 'eco'" and "the 'linguistics'" of ecolinguistics respectively. In summary, 'eco' covers three parts: (1) the sense of ecology that the book is concerned with, (2) what it means by "ecosophy", and (3) the ecosophy of the book. Based on Steffensen and Fill (2014)'s four different interpretations of the ecology of language, the author argues that it is human ecology that is of interest for the book, i.e. core focus on the relationships of humans with other humans, plants, animals and the physical environment. And this echoes what it is meant by 'ecosophy' in the book, which builds on Naess' ecosophy in Deep Ecology and other fields like social ecology and ethics. Basically, the ecosophy of the book has strong orientations to ecocentrality, sustainability and ecological ethics. And "the 'linguistics'" of ecolinguistics is described in two parts. For one thing, it refers to the linguistic theories that the book is based on, critical discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics in particular. For another, it shows the approach of the book the author conducts, that is, the linguistic analysis techniques. The chapter ends with the organization of the book and the explanation of data and glossary. In a word, the book's dual argument mentioned in Chapter 1 is quite convincing and stimulating that ecolinguistic analysis of the stories we live by cannot only provide a single framework that unites the linguistic framework and the ecological framework, but also offer an axiological framework with the ethical vision of rethinking and reevaluating people's actions.

   From Chapter 2 on, each chapter follows the explicit interpretative pattern of four parts. First, it begins with descriptions of some linguistic and cognitive theories, and then it put forwards the practical definitions of the story in this chapter. Then it reviews the previous literature about this story. After that, it comes to the key part of this chapter—practical linguistic analysis of the given texts in terms of their underlying stories.

Based on the definitions of ideologies and discourses, **Chapter 2** introduces <u>the first story—ideologies</u> and the corresponding three types of ideological discourses: destructive discourses, ambivalent discourses, and beneficial discourses. Each type of discourses has different subtypes, underlying stories, and thus different ways of dealing with them. Four subtypes of destructive discourses (i.e. economics discourses, advertising discourses, lifestyle magazine discourses, and industrial agriculture discourses) are described as conveying the stories that run counter to the ecosophy of the book, including PURCHASE OF A PRODUCT IS A SHORT CUT TO WELLBEING and FACTORY FARMING IS BENEFICIAL TO ANIMALS. Therefore, it is suggested that resistance be used to deal with such discourses. However, the constructive way of preserving and resisting is recommended to ambivalent discourses due to their ambiguously double aspects in accordance with the ecosophy of the book. Beneficial discourses, mainly found in the literary field (e.g. New Nature Writing and traditional Japanese discourses) are highly promoted thanks to their agreement with the ecosophy of the book. Then the author restates the methods of ecolinguistic analysis: collection of prototypical texts, analysis of linguistic patterns, exposure of underlying ideologies, and final ecosophical judgement. After that, the chapter takes the discourse of neoclassical economics as an example to show how the methods work in the practical discourses. The underlying stories from these discourses are quite clear-cut, including (1) IF SOME BUYS SOMETHING THAT THEY WANT, THEN THEIR LIFE IS IMPROVED; (2) CONSUMERS CAN NEVER BE SATISFIED. Then the chapter finishes with the contrastively different 'story of people' by Eisenstein. Generally speaking, this chapter consults two theories: (1) discourse theory, such as critical discourse analysis, positive discourse, and systemic-functional grammar; (2) social cognition theory, such as what makes an ideology. However, types of ideologies are equivocal in this chapter, and it is the same with its congruent relationships with types of discourses.

Derived from theories of artificial intelligence, sociology, linguistics and cognitive science, **Chapter 3** distinguishes three important concepts, <u>frame, framing, and reframing</u>. Four essential questions should be taken into consideration, i.e. values, response, criticism of an old frame, and creation of a new frame. Then the author offers three possible frames for the story of climate change: the problem frame, the predicament frame with two elements of a predicament and a response, and the tragic apocalyptical frame with an apocalypse and no response. Then it comes to the most impressive and incisive part of the chapter: the author provides a practical analysis of the framing of development by showing its origins and transformational trajectories. The author argues that the framing of development goes through 6 stages: (1) 'uncivilized'; (2) 'underdeveloped'; (3) 'equitable development'; (4) 'sustainable growth'; (5) 'inclusive green growth'; (6) 'sustained growth. Each stage has various consequences to the environment, the ecosystems, and the developing countries. This is an excellent example of what the author calls 'frame chaining' (Stibbe, 2015: 60). Three ways of resistance are proposed by frame analysts, frames of 'story' and 'myth', 'sustainable contraction', and 'sustainable retreat'. Nevertheless, some methodological questions remain unsettled in this chapter, such as how to figure out trigger words due to their central roles in the frames and how to deal with tragic apocalyptical frame. The alternative to the second question, I maintain, depends on what it is meant by 'apocalypse' and what vision ecolinguistic analysts of stories hold for solving ecological problems.

In the beginning of **Chapter 4**, the author redefines <u>the third story—metaphor</u> as the use of a frame "from a specific, concrete and imaginable area of life to structure how a clearly distinct area of life is conceptualized" (Stibbe, 2015: 64) and extends the use of metaphor to non-metaphoric framing with the concepts of 'source frame' and 'target domain'. Climate change is a case in point, which can be framed

metaphorically as "a roller coaster" and non-metaphorically as "a problem" and so on. Then the author points out metaphors are significant in metaphorical reasoning and coming to different conclusions. After that, the author suggests the methods of analyzing metaphors, including identification of source frame, target domain, and mapping elements; and then usage of reasoning patterns and final judgments. Then two important metaphors in ecolinguistics are brought into discussion: metaphors of nature and those of economics. Specifically, metaphors of nature have three versions: (1) destructive metaphors like 'NATURE IS A COMPETITION' and 'NATURE IS A MACHINE'; (2) ambivalent metaphors such as 'THE EARTH IS A SPECESHIP' and 'NATURE IS AN ORGANISM'; (3) more positive metaphors, for example, 'THE PLANT IS A PATIENT' and 'NATURE IS A PERSON'. It is thus very crucial to judge such metaphors with the key criterion of separating or connecting human and nature. Likewise, metaphors of economics have destructive versions (e.g. 'ECNOMIC GROWTH IS A TIDE) and beneficial versions (for example, 'CONSUMERISM IS A DISEASE'). Then the author analyses 'THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON' metaphor with the metaphor theory of activity at three levels (i.e. "dead", "sleeping/embedded" and "vivid"). The metaphor THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON is considered to be a dead metaphor in the word 'corporation' in isolation (with its Latin origins in the word corpus=body). Then it is regarded as a sleeping metaphor in economic discourses by means of hyponymy and metonymy. Finally, its reusability in legal discourses enables it to become a vivid metaphor. Whatever the activity of the metaphor, resistance of such metaphors are suggested due to its violation of the ecosophy of the book (since it grants 'human' rights to corporations, giving them more power). This chapter has great scalability in one sense that it extends the original ideas of what makes a metaphor in cognitive science to ecolinguistic analysis; and in another sense that it extends metaphorical framings of metaphors to non-metaphorical ones by building up the connection between metaphor and framing. Last but not least, this chapter also extends the categories of metaphors from destructive, ambivalent, and positive ones to dead, sleeping, and vivid ones.

   Chapter 5 demonstrates the fourth story— evaluations by two types of appraisal patterns (i.e. good and bad). Appraisal patterns can be worked out by appraisal items, such as explicit and implicit expressions, certain grammatical structures, certain metaphors, marked words, and pairings of contrasting words. Evaluations can be examined by using appraisal pattern theory. Then the complexity of evaluations shows up between the "potential" positivity and negativity the language system may grant to a certain word (through marking) and the practical ecological consequences this word may bring according to the ecosophy of the book, such as the words "convenience", "success", and " fast". The cultural evaluation of economic growth is an example in this regard. Then the author highlights the role of ecolinguistics in raising ecological awareness of such discourses and techniques of resistance by providing evidence, finding key indicators in such discourses, or redefining and replacing some key concepts (e.g. replacement of 'GDP' with 'Gross National Happiness'). Then the chapter finishes with the typical case of the evaluations of weather forecasts in UK with the striking features of consistent positivity towards 'SUNNY WEATHER' and negativity towards 'DARK', 'WATER', and other forms of weathers; and offers an alternative positive evaluation of Japanese Haiku poetry about nature and the concepts of *sabi* and *wabi*. This alternative to dealing with negativity in the evaluations of weather forecasts is quite worth pondering, since it is of great significance that discursive communication between different cultures (British and Japanese weather cultures) may exert the positive impact on the ecological sustainability in the global context. Nonetheless, I think the issue of the definition of appraisal patterns in this chapter remains to be more fully explored. Appraisal patterns are defined as "clusters of linguistic features which come together to represent an area

of life as good or bad" (Stibbe, 2015: 84). Such a dualistic division is not adequate enough to deal with some controversial or potentially confusing issues like the explicit positivity and negativity in the language system and its conversing implicit counterparts as well as the ecological consequences in the realistic world. A third alternative may be added to dealing with such problems, for example, the ambivalent appraisal pattern, and should be given more exploration and deeper explanation.

Based on the critical review of 'The Information Deficit Model' by various researchers, the author summarizes the general pattern of analyzing identities—the fifth story in **Chapter 6**, that is, finding and resisting destructive identities, and then establishing newly ecologically beneficial identities. Given that, the definitions of 'an identity' and 'a self-identity' are offered. Then the author takes the identity of an 'owner', a 'consumer', and that of a 'firm' to illustrate the extrinsic values and self-centered individualism embodied in these identities in economic discourse. It is the same with the case in consumerism discourses in critical studies and also in social movements. Alternatively, the author sets up links between ecological identity and pro-environmental behaviors with pronouns like "we" and "our", family grouping metaphors, and semantic expressions. Then the author brings the construction of consumer identities in *Men's Health* magazine into the discussion to show the close connection between identity, gender, and the body. This connection is quite significant in that this analysis sets a typical example for rethinking the role of identity plays in the social structure, the gender system, and more importantly, the ecosystem. However, some topics would be elaborated with further interpretation if given more space. Firstly, what makes an ecological identity? The author presents Thomashow's definition and redefinition of it, but does not develop his own conceptualization of it in detail. Then the systematic analysis and possible criteria of an ecological identity would be the next urgent topic to be figured out. Besides, the author recommends that self-centered stories such as AN IDEAL MAN HAS HUGE MUSCLES should be resisted with stories that consider others such as "connecting with other people, connecting with nature, or working towards the benefit of the community" (Stibbe, 2015:124). My question is what next? What are the further actions for this ecological connection of building an ecological identity in the ideal ecological community?

Chapter 7 starts with descriptions of climate change, and puts forwards the definitions of convictions—the sixth story and facticity patterns. The author conveys that facticity patterns are explored by a wide range of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and critical discourse analysis. And then the author suggests that the notion of modality is of great help in analyzing facticity patterns. Through the examination of nuclear fuel industry, the author finds two different voices from the industry itself and the environmental critics. Then the author comes to the facticity of science and its implications in ecolinguistics in terms of transformation of levels of certainty in facticity patterns. After that, the author turns to the connection of precision between hybrid facticity of science with natural writing. At last, the author provides a comparative analysis of two texts of "climate change countermovement" to show how the facticity patterns undermine environmentalist positions. The case of the transformation of certainty between the original research and the media's re-expression is significant because this can shed a new light on the future orientation the academic circles may develop towards in advocating the ecosophy of the book. However, I see the introduction of 'the facticity of science' as a digression in this chapter due to its weak connection with the ecosophy of the book. The scale of modality is quite easy to grasp, while the scale of facticity (which includes other aspects that make statements sound factual in addition to modality) requires more explanation, though the author uses the scale of facility to analyze several convictions several times

afterwards. The interpretation of "'hybrid' facticity pattern", where facticity is built up in two different ways in the same text, also requires more explanation.

The seventh story—erasure, together with erasure patterns, is presented in **Chapter 8**. To begin with, the definitions of 'erasure' and 'an erasure pattern' are presented, which are much concerned with the erasure of people in the form of nominalizations, the discourse of finance, and the erasure of animals. Then the author suggests the analysis of erasure is involved in the observation of a particular sentence in a particular text to find out which type of erasure (the void, the mask, and the trace) it belongs to. The discourse of neoclassical economics is an example of the void. And discourses about agribusiness are mainly concerned with the mask, especially in the case of objectification of animals. Then the chapter finishes with the author's systemic analysis of the trace in the language of ecosystem assessment, with striking forms of replacement of subordinates, representations of places, to name just a few.

Chapter 9 talks about the last story—salience, together with re-minding and salience patterns, which is closed related to erasure in **Chapter 8**. Based on the above three definitions, the author claims analysts should come up with which area of life should be made more salient. The the notion of ecolinguistics as a form of re-minding is very enlightening due to its important reposition beyond the linguistics proper. Then the resistance of abstraction is highlighted, in the form of personalization, individualization, and foregrounding participants in clauses. Then the author shows abundant examples of visual images in giving different degrees of salience to animals. And the chapter ends with the detailed analysis of salience in New Nature writing.

Chapter 10 summaries the whole book in terms of the definition of ecolinguistics, the theories, criticisms from critical discourse analysis, and concludes with the ecosophy of the book—sustainability of life.

Next I come to Stibbe's central tenets on eco-discourse analysis theory, concerning his views of language/discourse, ecology, and ecosophy. For each point, I will first present Stibbe's views, and then provide some comments. Then I will conclude by offering the implications of eco-discourse analysis theory for the future development of ecolinguistics in the global context.

3. Stibbe's central tenets on eco-discourse analysis theory: a duet of two stories

As mentioned in section 1, Stibbe's tenets on eco-discourse analysis can be best manifest in his two monographs, *Animals Erased*[1] and *Ecolinguistics*, which I call 'a duet of two stories'.

3.1 Stibbe's view of language/discourse

One central idea in *Ecolinguistics* is that language plays a significant role in the natural and social environment, which is presented with the following typical account in *Ecolinguistics*:

The link between ecology and language is that how humans treat each other and the natural world is influenced by our thoughts, concepts, ideas, ideologies and worldviews, and these in turn are shaped through language. It is through language that economic systems are built, and when those systems are seen to lead to immense suffering and ecological destruction, it is through language that they are resisted and new forms of economy brought into being. It is through language that consumerist identities are built

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[1] For the book review of *Animals Erased*, see Contessa, 2013; Gorsevski, 2013; Milstein, 2013; Walch, 2013.

and lives orientated towards accumulation, and it is through language that consumerism is resisted and people are inspired to 'be more rather than have more'. It is through language that the natural world is mentally reduced to objects or resources to be conquered, and it is through language that people can be encouraged to respect and care for the systems that support life.

(Stibbe, 2015: 2)

Stibbe also holds this view in *Animals Erased*:

The main argument is that some "destructive" discourses represent animals in ways that promote inhumane treatment and environmental damage, that some "counter" discourses such as environmentalism fail to break free of the assumptions of destructive discourses, but that it is possible to discover radically different "alternative" discourses that encourage reconnection to animals and nature.

(Stibbe, 2012: 3)

Animals are not only represented in language as different, but also as inferior, the two conditions necessary for oppression.

(Stibbe, 2012: 23)

This view of language and discourse places great emphasis on the dual impact of language on the world and can be traced back to social constructivism and cognitive science. Importantly, this view of language in relation to the world is essentially unanimous with Fill's (2010) notion of "interaction between language and the world":

An ecological view of language thus means considering impact on both sides: languages are seen as organisms in an environment (a society, or even the earth as a whole): they have mutual influence on each other, but they also interact with their environment, since this environment (society) in its turn influences language – and vice versa.

(Fill, 2010: 176)

This ecological understanding of language and discourse is significant in that the intrinsic connection generated by language as a bridge between humans, animals, the natural world, the economic systems, and any other party involved can continuously contribute to the benign dynamics of the harmonious interrelationships in the global ecosystem. Further, such view of language in Stibbe's attempt to build up the reconnection with the world will help resist the negative influences from destructive discourses and thus promote a more comprehensive vision of treating discourse as an essential means to ecosophy of ecolinguistics.

3.2 Stibbe's view of ecology

Stibbe's view of ecology take shape by combining and extending social and deep ecology with great emphasis on human ecology, including both human beings and animals:

It is therefore *human ecology* (Gare 2002) that is of interest, which can be defined as *the interaction of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment*. Language, culture, human

cognition, stories and texts play a role in human ecology to the extent that they influence human behavior, and hence the ways that humans interact with each other and the larger natural world.

(Stibbe, 2015: 8)

Animals are disappearing, vanishing, dying out, not just in the physical sense of becoming extinct, but in the sense of being erased from our consciousness.

(Stibbe, 2012: 3)

The current trajectory that society is on is so clearly heading toward ecological collapse and that intensive farms are damaging animals' welfare on such a huge scale that we need to do more than fight against circumstances. What is needed is a larger shift of consciousness, a change in dominant models of reality and the discourses that encode them.

(Stibbe, 2012: 10)

On the view of human ecology, Stibbe calls for concerns for the consequences of human beings' behaviors or actions on the world, animals in particular. On the account of that, he maintains that animals should not be erased or ignored. This view of ecology is significant because it shares the intrinsic values of life and places human and non-human life forms at the center and first priorities of eco-discourse analysis theory, which will in turn exert a positive influence on the sustainability of the ecosystem as a whole.

3.3 Stibbe's view of ecosophy

Stibbe is arguably the first ecolinguist to bring Naess's term "ecosophy" (1990) into the ecolinguistics proper and develop the ecosophy of ecolinguistics on his own, which is highlighted in his two monographs.

Ecosophy in one word: *Living*!

(Stibbe, 2015: 14)

The ecosophy draws (a) from deep ecology in being ecocentric (giving consideration to other species as well as humans), although there is a pragmatic emphasis on human wellbeing; (b) from social ecology in being orientated towards social justice; (c) from sustainable development in considering future generations; and (d) from Transition and the Dark Mountain Project in recognizing and responding to inevitable environmental change.

(Stibbe, 2015: 15)

This ecosophy, in its different stages from oppression to ecological animalism, is used in the analysis of language in each chapter. The aim is to use linguistic techniques to expose the models of the world that particular discourses are based on and then measure those models against the ecosophy, pointing out where they fall short of the ecosophical principles. For instance, the ecosophy places great emphasis on respecting the nature of animals, and discourses are criticized for denying that nature and representing them as machines or objects.

(Stibbe, 2012: 16)

This multi-dimensional ecosophy not only is reflected in the methodological and philosophical considerations of the two books, but more importantly, throws some insights on the realization of ecological harmony in three specific dimensions, namely the moral, ethical and social dimensions. The moral dimension of the ecosophy, I think, refers to moral justifications of animals erased, reconsiderations of moral values, and final orientations towards moral actions by human beings. The ethical dimension is characterized by the increasing ethical concerns about the ethical issues in the ecological crisis and the effectively ethical responses. The social dimension of the ecosophy is engaged in shared social values in the human society, and extensionally, in the social aspects of animals (Stibbe, 2012).

3.4 Implications for ecolinguistics

Stibbe's views of language, ecology and ecosophy are compatible with the emerging tendency of ecolinguistics towards a life science due to their shared vison of life forms by means of the impact of language (or discourse) on the world (Steffensen, 2007):

> Ecolinguistics re-orientates linguistics so that its practitioners become sensitive, responsible and active sharetakers-i.e. participants in the local, global and universal communities of humans and non-humans-whose point of departure is patterns of language and communication.

(Steffensen, 2007: 14)

Therefore, eco-discourse analysis theory on the whole can offer great implications for the future development of the discipline, especially the moral, ethical and social dimensions of the ecosophy can help connect the world of nature with that of the human society. One step further is to provide convincing evidence for the assumptions that the ecosophy is based on, a step that Stibbe agrees with (personal communication). The ecosophy of an ecolinguist is based on assumptions about language, ecology, and interaction with the world, and empirical investigation can help to confirm these assumptions. For example, an evidence-based approach can be adopted to figure out the validity that representing animals as being intrinsically valuable will be expected to influence people not to harm them.

Conclusion

This book review offers a critical examination on Stibbe's two monographs, *Ecolinguistics* and *Animals Erased* with a threefold purpose: first, it offers a detailed overview of *Ecolinguistics*. Second, it provides a systematic review of Stibbe's central tenets on eco-discourse analysis theory, that is, Stibbe's views of language/discourse, ecology and ecosophy. Given that, it further illustrates the implications for the future development of ecolinguistics. I maintain that Stibbe's view of language, ecology and ecosophy can help add some moral, ethical and social dimensions in rethinking the discipline as a life science.

In conclusion, the author's attempt to strive for a unified framework of ecological discourse that connects the linguistics proper and the ecology proper will have an unneglectable impact on the future horizons of the interdisciplinary field of ecolinguistics.

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