

An Ecolinguistic Evaluation of Sustainability Via Ecological Discourse Analysis of High School English Language Learner Produced Texts

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This project evaluates linguistic expression of sustainability within language learners' contexts through the lens of ecolinguistics, defined as a field which explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species, and the physical environment (The International Ecolinguistics Association 2024). The research question of this doctoral research project is two part:

1. *How might adoption of ecopedagogical language learning impact learners' orientation towards the natural environment?*
2. *To what extent may ecological discourse analysis (EDA), and ecophilosophical analysis of learner texts, reveal learners' orientation towards the natural environment?*

In Your Own Backyard is a research project run with Polish public secondary English language students preparing for the Polish matriculation exam. Learners engage in student-centered, sensory-rich, ecologically-based, and meaningful lexical learning with integrated domains to produce 6 diagnostic texts. The texts produced and activities of the exercises are reflective - learners are asked to investigate their place in the natural ecosystem and how they view themselves in this position - where factors of equity, harmony, and sustainability in the contexts of social and environmental ecologies are discussion points as foundational tenets of ecopedagogy (Goulah and Katunich, 2020, pp.2-3).

Through ethnographic data collection and ecological discourse analysis (of the 6 diagnostic texts), assessment of learners' relationship to the natural world and sustainability are gauged over time. The analysis employs a methodology of ecological discourse analysis (EDA) and ecosophy (ecological philosophy), which attempts to classify ecological property found in discourse produced by research participants. Ecological property is identified as a reference to the natural environment through foregrounding, backgrounding, framing, appraisal items, and actor, to communicate narratives or the "stories we live by" (Wu, 2018, pp. 646-647). The ecological property is then juxtaposed against sustainable methodology or ecosophy of "diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence" (Naes in Drengson 2000, p. 69, Stibbe 2015, 202, Zhang and He 2020), to establish whether the presentation of ecological property is ecologically beneficial, ecologically ambivalent, or ecologically destructive (Mullhauser and Schultz, 2001, pp. 33-34 and 109-110). That is, does this representation of nature encourage biodiversity, symbiotic and harmonious interaction, to coexist sustainably with the more-than-human-world, and (is there a change noticed as each text is produced equitably distributed over the time span of the project.

Based on initial analysis, the researcher has observed a trend of greater sustainability (137% increase) from the first unit to the fifth, from eco destructive to eco beneficial, in participant narratives. In addition, EDA functions as an effective standard of assessing a text's sustainability.

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