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**Eco-critical language awareness for English language teaching (ELT): Promoting justice, wellbeing, and sustainability in the classroom**

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**Abstract:** Critical Language Awareness (CLA) seeks to promote social justice by explicitly calling attention to power issues in the context of literacy development and language instruction. In this article, we assert that a CLA approach to English language teaching (ELT) which does not recognize and account for the urgency of climate change and its myriad effects on present and future generations of learners is flawed. It is time ELT extends a critical lens to the role that our practices and pedagogies serve in the (re)production of attitudes, ideologies, identities, and actions which contribute to ecological degradation and climate crisis while also engaging how we may advance ecological wellbeing and sustainability. This article outlines the rationale for this ecolinguistics-informed CLA (eco-CLA) approach to English language instruction by asserting the compatibility of eco-linguistics and CLA and the intersection of social, linguistic, and environmental justice. It then presents and discusses five principles for an eco-CLA approach to ELT that can be applied to a range of language learning contexts. Finally, it demonstrates how these principles can be operationalized within ELT by presenting a series of instructional activities.

**Keywords:** critical language awareness; eco-critical language awareness; ecolinguistics; English language teaching; sustainable pedagogy

1 Introduction

As the effects of climate change become ever more severe, the number of displaced peoples forced to move from spaces no longer inhabitable will rise (Goulah 2010,
2012, 2020; Katunich 2020). Though estimates vary, the World Bank projects 200 million people will be displaced by 2050 due to climate change (Clement et al. 2021). These climate refugees will present “a new and often traumatic identity dimension” to the many educational settings which they enter, including the English language classroom (Goulah and Katunich 2020: 9). It is becoming increasingly clear that the ecological crisis intersects with English language teaching (hereafter ELT) classrooms. Therefore, ELT professionals must deeply and meaningfully engage with the role of English and ELT in the (re)production of attitudes, ideologies, identities, and actions which contribute to ecological degradation and climate crisis. And in doing so, ELT researchers and practitioners must develop, evaluate, and implement pedagogical practices that contribute to ecological wellbeing, sustainability, and justice. Though this eco-critical turn has begun (see Goulah and Katunich 2020), our article attempts to further contribute to the development of practices and pedagogies within ELT that promote sustainability and ecological wellbeing.

In this article, we present an eco-critical pedagogy that integrates elements of Critical Language Awareness (hereafter CLA) (Fairclough 2001) with the framework of ecolinguistics, as we assert that a CLA-informed approach within ELT does not recognize and account for the urgency of climate change and its myriad effects on present and future generations of language learners. Our article outlines the rationale for this ecolinguistics-informed CLA approach (hereafter eco-CLA) to English language instruction by asserting the compatibility of ecolinguistics and CLA and the intersection of social, linguistic, and environmental justice. We then present a collection of principles for an eco-CLA approach to ELT that can be applied to a range of language learning contexts and demonstrate how these principles can be operationalized within ELT by presenting a series of instructional activities.

2 Critical language awareness and ecolinguistics

Since the late 20th century, critical pedagogies aimed at addressing a variety of social justice issues have been developed and implemented within ELT (see Kumaravadivelu [2006] for further discussion). English language teachers from around the world (e.g. Huh et al. 2021; Rodríguez Martínez 2017; Mora 2014) have attempted to use their “unique positioning” to advance social justice for language learners in their classrooms (Kouritzin 2020: 69). One such approach, CLA is “a perspective on teaching second, additional, heritage, or other languages that is based in values of social justice” (Crookes 2021: 247) with a goal “to educate critical, ethical and politically engaged citizens” (Achugar 2015: 1). More specifically, CLA
centers “values of social justice” (Crookes 2021: 247) through “the inclusion of explicit discussions about power issues in the context of literacy and language instruction” (Achugar 2015: 1), thereby seeking to challenge the ways through which “language contributes to the domination of some people by others” (Fairclough 2001: 193). Briefly, from an ecolinguistics perspective, such domination extends to nonhuman animals and the environment.

Indeed, efforts to produce/empower positive social change and promote social justice for/by learners are undeniably important. However, as the climate crisis worsens, social justice must now encompass environmental justice (Delavan 2020; Stibbe 2014, 2021). To state it clearly, in this era of climate crisis, social justice, and environmental justice are inseparable (Canagarajah 2020), and thus, an attempt to address one without recognition for its intersection with the other is flawed (Bowers 2001). If ELT is to advance a critical language pedagogy that draws upon the “life situation of the learners as expressed in the themes of their reality” (Crookes 2021: 249), climate change can no longer be absent from our curriculum and its effects on the lived experiences of learners must be recognized within English language classrooms. It is our belief in the intersection of environmental and social justice and ultimately wellbeing and sustainability which motivates this article and the pedagogical approach it forwards.

Reflecting Stibbe’s (2014) arguments for the synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ecolinguistics, we similarly contend that complementarity is present between CLA and ecolinguistics. In an early elaboration of CLA, Fairclough (1992) asserted that CLA helps learners develop into democratic participants of their societies through a “critical consciousness of key [sociolinguistic] elements within their social and physical environment” (Fairclough 1992: 6). This mention of physical environment hints to the potential for CLA to help learners reveal and challenge unsustainable practices and ideologies in their own communities while likewise cultivating more harmonious relationships with “the more-than-human world” (Abram 1996: 95). Fairclough later more directly references ecological crisis in discussions of CLA. For instance, he identifies social justice issues of poverty, inequality, racism, and sexism as clear domains deserving critical investigation but also cites “the unsustainable exploitation of the world’s natural resources” (Fairclough 2001: 203) as desirous of attention as well. In a case study relevant to this discussion, Janks (2020) shows the compatibility between a critical approach to literacy and environmental activism. The author explores the work of Greta Thunberg and how the young activist relies on elements of critical literacy and anglophone resources to advance sustainability. The case study illustrates that critical literacy is viable and effective as a way of being and acting (See Vasquez et al. [2019] for further discussion of critical literacy as a way of being). Thus,
according to CLA, “it is not enough to read the wor(l)d critically if that does not lead to transformative social change” (Janks 2020: 571).

Ecological linguistics has long explored “the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment” (Stibbe 2021: 223). Studies in ecological linguistics have investigated various discursive strategies of multinational corporations when discussing the environment (e.g. Alexander 2009, 2013; Brown 2008; Lischinsky 2011; Lischinsky and Sjölander 2014), explored depictions of nonhuman animals in discourse (e.g. Frayne 2019; Fusari 2018; Goatly 2002; Sealey 2018; Sealey and Oakley 2013), analyzed representations and framings of climate change (Carvalho 2005; Fløttum et al. 2014; Grundmann and Scott 2014; Liu and Huang 2022), and much more. Insights revealed through such research can similarly be reached through pedagogical mediation in classrooms in which texts and language use of ecological importance are explored by students. Such pedagogical practices are reflective of the posthumanist turn in applied linguistics which offers “a new way of thinking about our ethical responsibility to each other and the world” (Pennycook 2018: 140).

Indeed, there is an increasing sense that language use, at every level, should be explored from a sustainable perspective. At the classroom level, ecological linguistics facilitates such an exploration. In one such sample, Haig (2001) introduces texts from a Japanese Whaling Institute and Greenpeace to help learners see not only “what they [texts] mean, but how they [mean]” (Haig 2001: 206). Similarly, in Poole (2016), second language writers have presented keyword lists derived from a corpus analysis of blog posts from an environmental advocacy group and press releases from a multinational mining corporation engaged in debate concerning the possible construction of a massive open-pit copper mine. Through the analysis of the corpus data, learners were able to identify and analyze how the two groups’ linguistic choices diverged and how distinct value systems were reflected in the messages from the two organizations. More recently, Goulah (2017, 2018, 2019) has presented numerous pedagogical realizations of “language education into the Anthropocene” (Goulah 2021: 86).

Ecological linguistics provides the means to extend CLA in order to produce sustainable pedagogy for English language classrooms. In practice, an eco-CLA approach to English language education aims at identifying and promoting language use which contributes to ecological sustainability, justice, and wellbeing. Additionally, ELT professionals also need to enable learners to challenge the unsustainable “stories-we-live-by” (Stibbe 2015, 2021) embedded in texts and discourses by recognizing the linguistic patterns through which these destructive discourses are normalized and reproduced. In other words, learners should be empowered to counteract negative messages that perpetuate environmental destruction. Through such pedagogy, learners may cultivate eco-critical language
awareness as they develop the ability to identify language use that favors sustainability as well as language use that constrains the creation of more ecologically sustainable ways of being.

3 Principles of ecolinguistics-informed critical language awareness

There has been increasing interest in the development of sustainable pedagogies for a variety of educational contexts with many studies exploring how language use in the classroom encourages or discourages sustainability (Damico et al. 2020; Dobrin and Weisser 2002; Haig 2001; Jacobs and Dillon 2019; Molthan-Hill et al. 2020; Prádanos 2015; Stibbe 2004, 2009, 2019). In relation to the present article, the field of ELT has participated in similar efforts to develop sustainable pedagogical practices (Goulah 2017, 2018; Goulah and Katunich 2020). These studies reflect a pedagogical interpretation of ecolinguistics as they explore how language use affects students’ perceptions of and interactions with nature. An eco-CLA approach to ELT further examines the connection between language use and sustainability while also seeking to make the power relationships in such connections explicit, thereby enabling learners to challenge ecologically harmful practices in favor of those which contribute to ecological wellbeing and justice. As with CLA, eco-CLA operates with the tenets that (1) learning is participatory; (2) teaching is the guiding of participation; and (3) language is an open and dynamic meaning-making system (Achugar 2015). With these foundational tenets in mind, we present five eco-CLA principles for the English language classroom:

1. **Eco-CLA presents learning as bound to the physical world and its many human and nonhuman animal inhabitants.**

ELT classrooms have tended to discuss knowledge abstractly rather than in connection to the physical world. However, this is not the sole nor the more complete interpretation of knowledge-making. Aristotle, for instance, held that philosophy was the understanding of nature’s processes. However, the West moved away from this view, especially through the Enlightenment, and the development of knowledge became an abstract exercise devoid of spatial necessity – the mind was separated from nature, and ecological physicality became subordinated to the abstract intellect (Dobrin and Weisser 2002). Historically, language classrooms focused primarily on linguistic form as separated from social and physical interactions. However, in the second part of the 20th century, as appreciation for interaction and context emerged and communicative methods
gained prominence, ELT increasingly emphasized the communicative functions of language use (Brown and Lee 2015). However, ELT has been slower to take the additional step and see the knowledge-making aspect of language learning as integrated not only with the interaction within/between human communities but also as the result of the interactive patterns between humans and nature more broadly. In contrast, eco-CLA, informed by posthumanism, holds that “humans are no longer set apart from the world – distinct, inalienable creatures who control the environment – but [are] part of it, interwoven into the fabric of things” (Pennycook 2018: 129). Moreover, an eco-CLA approach to ELT makes explicit that knowledge in the West has largely failed to consider the knowledge suggested by nature. Such disconnect has resulted in environmental destruction, species loss, and the suffering of countless ecosystems and their human and nonhuman inhabitants. An eco-CLA approach to ELT helps students to understand that interactions with nature and nonhuman animals are integral to knowledge building and to reflect upon, identify, and challenge destructive ideologies that ignore these relationships.

(2) **Eco-CLA promotes wellbeing and sustainability as common sense.**

Schools play a fundamental role in normalizing and perpetuating the belief systems present within a society. Thus, as schools (re)produce the unsustainable ways of being widely held by society, these unsustainable “stories-we-live-by” (Stibbe 2015, 2021) become part of children’s worldviews rather early in their lives. This problem also presents an ideal window of opportunity as schools can be reimagined and reconfigured into spaces where sustainability becomes common practice and common sense. This movement to sustainability can be facilitated through pedagogy that foregrounds sustainability and wellbeing as learning goals. In such a context, teachers guide learners to explicitly identify unsustainable narratives in everyday discourse and to utilize their varied linguistic resources to challenge them.

(3) **Eco-CLA promotes the development of ecological consciousness by engaging students in localized sustainable thinking.**

For some instructors, the prioritization of environmental preoccupations in the classroom may seem as an ideological imposition on students. Kouritzin (2020) reports that some students challenged the sustainable focus of her classes as distracting from their goals and expectations in a college level composition class. However, Kouritzin asserts that the environmental crisis permits educators to promote sustainability in the classroom. From a CLA perspective, it seems counterintuitive for teachers to marginalize students’ interests and desires in favor of their own priorities, for CLA seeks to promote educational experiences that allow
learners to resist such ideological impositions. It follows that eco-CLA can neither promote nor produce meaningful social change if it attempts to do so through imposition on learners.

Educators, therefore, must seek to engage students’ personal concerns and lived experiences as a means of promoting sustainability by inviting learners to reflect on how sustainability issues directly affect them, their communities, and their geographical locations (Dobrin and Weisser 2002). In addition, they should seek to engage learners’ values as starting points to the development of ecological perspectives. Similarly, teachers’ sustainability efforts would gain from reflecting on how sustainable issues directly affect their communities and students. Such localization is reflected in Goulah (2017) in which a pedagogical unit focuses of the effects on climate change for refugee English language learners, enabling students to explore how climate change has impacted their lives and their displacement. In an additional application previously mentioned, the students in Poole (2016) explored and analyzed the language use concerning the construction of an open-pit copper mine in the mountains only miles from their campus. In both instances, the learners engaged with ecological wellbeing as it related to their lives and experiences rather than as distant and abstract conditions. And importantly, language learning remained prominent within a pedagogy designed to cultivate ecological awareness amongst learners.

(4) Eco-CLA advocates for students negatively affected by climate change, especially for students from marginalized communities.

An eco-CLA language classroom explicitly explores the intersection of social (in)justice and climate change and how these issues influence the present and future lived experiences of learners and their communities. The neoliberal conditions and their supporting narratives that cause social injustice and unsustainability should be highlighted for learners. The history of civil rights struggles shows that social change comes through advocacy, and thus, any sincere attempt to improve learners living conditions must find space in the classroom to advocate for learners while likewise enabling and empowering learners to advocate for themselves. Indeed, CLA seeks “to help students find and create insurgent voices that question the reality that surrounds them” in order that they may “understand their lives and the possibilities which they are presented” (Valdés 1998: 16). Similarly, eco-CLA aims to empower students to explore ecological problems that affect their communities and to advocate for a more just and sustainable reality. In addition, from a CLA perspective, educators have the responsibility to challenge and expose curricular practices that elevate one language and one culture over other languages and cultures (Mora 2014). Extending this CLA stance, educators also have
the responsibility to advocate for students’ presents and futures by promoting sustainability in their pedagogy and by empowering students to advocate for a more sustainable world.

(5) A pedagogical application of eco-CLA promotes language instruction that presents multiple English varieties as equal.

Initially, it may be difficult to conceptualize the application of Englishes in the classroom, yet before English, there were Englishes, and, before a national language, there were multiple anglophone linguistic practices (Delavan 2020). For Delavan (2020: 34), “to teach Englishes, uncapitalized and nonsingular, is to teach them additively, helping students to add an anglophone identity while still sustaining their other identities”. Where English’s unsustainable ideologies imposed their narratives, Englishes seek to free learners to engage sustainability. Critical literacy seeks to make explicit the ideological nature of language use (Janks 2014), and consequently, Englishes attempt to empower learners to use their linguistic repertoires as a way of reshaping their identities toward sustainability. Encouraging multiple anglophone practices in the classroom potentially leads to various anglophone identities, as opposed to a unified, economic-driven national identity. Such flexibility, in the context of sustainable teaching, may guide learners to develop sustainable anglophone identities and the linguistic practices that break from the economic associations of standard English varieties.

Englishes finds practical and pedagogical realization in interpretations of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). According to Jenkins (2014), ELF has the potential to function as a linguistic practice beyond so-called native speaker conventions and norms. In other words, in ELF, every speaker of English has the same agentive power to follow, create, and recreate linguistic conventions, as all language users have equal ownership of Englishes. In addition, ELF and Englishes seeks to disrupt the legacies of colonialism and imperialism captured in Kachru’s (1996) three circles of English model. ELF aims at enabling communication across physical and linguistic boundaries (Seidhofer 2009), and Englishes aims at freeing English from neoliberal, unsustainable preoccupations. Thus, a vision of Englishes realized through ELF in the classroom provides learners clear sustainable objectives that they can realize, shape, and enrich by engaging one another in functional linguistic interactions. That is to say, the success of students’ linguistic participation is not measured by their adherence to or departure from established linguistic conventions and the ideologies embedded within but by their ability to use language in diverse ways that foster wellbeing and sustainability. As learners create and modify language to meet ecological goals, they also construe their interpretation of the world in sustainable ways (Delavan 2020).
The realization of *englishes* and ELF is supported by recent trends in social media. As noted, Kachru’s three circles model points to the historical effects of colonialism and the power struggle between nation states as a determinant of the power of certain English varieties (Kachru 1996). However, such a model obscures the natural fluidity that English varieties realize through social media in which varieties become detached from nationalistic conventions and standards (Seidlhofer 2009). As a result of social media, previously marginalized versions of English have at times gained wider linguistic influence than historically privileged standardized English varieties (Mair 2017). Media is enacting a democratization of English, and this trend, already at hand, offers a linguistic landscape for the enactment of *englishes* within eco-CLA.

4 Illustrating ecolinguistics-informed critical language awareness

As an initial pedagogical example, we present an assignment designed for a composition course for second language writers of English in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. The assignment tasks learners with crafting and compiling a portfolio of texts from social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and new media such as podcasting. Through this assignment, learners have the opportunity to engage critically with multiple texts of environmental relevance, advocate for a cause of interest, identify and share possible solutions, and call others to act. Ideally, learners should have the opportunity to engage with such an assignment and its supporting activities for numerous classroom meetings. Through such an assignment, learners engage with a variety of environmental issues and have the space and support to explore issues meaningfully. We present this first activity as an assignment sheet that can be directly delivered to learners (Table 1) and the subsequent activities as lesson plans (Tables 2 and 3).

The social media portfolio assignment fulfills the five eco-CLA principles previously enumerated. The assignment assumes that online spaces do not permit knowledge creation separate from the physical realities of learners. Thus, online reflections of sustainable issues are promotions of natural physical experiences. This point is rather important for interaction in online spaces is often seen as distinct and separate from “real life” physical spaces. It is important to explicitly address the role of the internet not as an escape from reality but as a space to negotiate more sustainable interactions with the physical world. In addition, for learners to fulfill the assignment expectations, they need to identify and be aware
of unsustainable narratives in order to effectively challenge their reproduction. Moreover, learners themselves choose multiple localized sustainability issues to discuss in their assignments. Learners also get to advocate for themselves or for others as part of the assignment. And finally, the nature of online genres allows for the realization of *Englishes* and ELF as the language employed by students exists beyond reified academic genres in a space where conventions and norms are ever in flux.

The second pedagogical example (Table 2) aims at encouraging learners to engage with nature experientially. As with the previous example, this activity was designed for a composition course for EAP learners. However, the activity’s simplicity makes it particularly easy to adapt to a wide range of learning contexts.

### Table 1: Eco-CLA activity 1: Using online genres to promote sustainability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Portfolio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This assignment engages with social media as a way of promoting sustainability and wellbeing. The first step is to select a topic of environmental relevance and interest. While you may explore issues such as deforestation of the Amazon, the development and adoption of renewable energies, the conditions of climate change refugees, you are encouraged to “localize” the issue to our community. For example, while you could explore the topic of renewable energy, you could localize it by connecting the topic to how our school, community, or region engages with renewable sources of energy. Once you have selected and investigated your topic, you will complete three of the following social media tasks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Advocacy on Instagram: This is your chance to advocate for more sustainable practices within your community. For the task, you will compose an Instagram post that raises awareness and/or proposes solutions for your topic. Your post must include an image related to your cause and a caption of 250 words or less that has a clearly articulated goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. TikTok Solutions: This is your opportunity to conceive a solution for a sustainable issue related to your topic. Through a TikTok post, briefly introduce the issue and offer a practical solution. For this mini project, you may rely on TikTok’s many tools for developing a problem-solution narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Informational Podcast: As you have now researched your topic, you are now our expert on the issue. This podcast is your opportunity to inform your listeners about the ins and outs of your topic. In a 5 min mini-podcast, inform your listeners about the facts and details that make your topic relevant in today’s world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Call-to-action Tweet: This is your opportunity to leave a lasting impression on our audience. In a tweet, formulate an inspiring call to action that is related to your topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goal of your social media portfolio is to help you explore different online genres and understand their potential for making public arguments concerning issues of environmental relevance. A successful portfolio creatively maximizes the features of each genre to promote interest, raise awareness, and prompt action regarding your issue.</td>
</tr>
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Table 2: Eco-CLA activity 2: Promoting an experiential understanding of nature.

**Scientific Writing versus Nature Poetry**

This activity aims at helping learners distinguish between experiencing nature versus quantifying nature. The activity asks learners to compare messages about nature embedded in nature poetry and those communicated in scientific news articles and how each genre suggests a different way of relating to the natural world. The activity follows these basic steps:

1. The teacher pairs students and asks each pair to read a scientific news article and a nature poem. Ideally, both texts should discuss the same topic. For instance, we recommend the article *How Rivers Regulate Global Carbon Cycle* from Science Daily and the poem *Autumn River Song* by Li Bai as good fits for the EAP context. However, a more informal source of scientific writing may help the success of the activity in other pedagogical contexts. Students should have at least 10 min to read the assigned texts.

2. The teacher then asks the student pairs to discuss for 5 min what each respective text has to say about nature. The teacher shows learners a set of questions to guide discussions through the different perspectives exemplified in each text. We suggest the following questions:
   - What ideas are discussed in the poem/scientific news article?
   - What is the purpose of the poem/scientific news article?
   - What audiences are more likely to read the poem/scientific news article?
   - How would you describe the language used in the poem/scientific news article?

3. As a transition, the teacher says something in the lines of “as we can see, both texts, while discussing the same topic, communicate different things about it”. It is important that educators explicitly raise awareness about the different types of nature messages common to each genre.

4. At this point, through a class discussion, the teacher should guide students to the realization that scientific articles tend to communicate about nature in non-experiential ways and how this perspective tends to be dominant in the way people engage with the natural world. In addition, the teacher should explain how poems are often experiential genres as they engage the readers’ feelings and that poems can help us get closer to nature and experience it. Moreover, the teacher should encourage learners to problematize understanding nature only in taxonomical ways rather than also interpreting nature through our senses.

5. The teacher, if possible, invites learners on a walk to a nearby location, such as a park or garden, where learners can focus on the natural world. The teacher then invites them to focus on how one of their senses interprets nature, for instance, the feeling of holding a blossoming flower. The teacher then invites learners to write a haiku about this experience. For simplicity, haikus could be described as short three-line poems that focus on the impact of a single moment. To exemplify the exercise, the teacher can read the haiku *An Ancient Pond!* by Matsuo Basho. Students should have at least 15 min for this activity. Alternatively, in case mobility is limited, the teacher can bring plants to the classroom or ask learners to write the haikus based on previous experiences with nature.

6. After the activity, and back in the classroom, the students and the teacher will discuss together the many ways in which writing haikus helped the class experience nature.
and for a variety of language proficiency levels. While the present activity consists of a comparison between scientific writing and nature poetry, likely most appropriate for high intermediate and advanced proficiency students, texts could be differently selected to reflect the needs of other settings and learners.

At the heart of the activity is the comparison of how two text types communicate differently about the same topic. In this sample, the teacher leads a simple genre analysis of the poem and scientific news article about the same topic. Afterward, the teacher and learners evaluate how each text communicates different qualities about the same topic. The goal is for learners to realize that scientific writing often nominalizes and thus commodifies and quantifies the natural world while different forms of language use may promote more experiential qualities through their presentation of the physical world through actions and processes. This invites learners to consider nature beyond the taxonomical discourse most often presented to them in academic and science texts. In addition, it invites learners to commune with nature and to experience it more closely, a delight aptly communicated by poetry. While the first activity illustrated an actual assignment to be delivered to learners, the following presents an activity along with suggestions for instructors on how to implement or adapt them for their specific classroom contexts.

The second activity also fulfills the eco-CLA principles discussed in this article. The activity promotes the physical epistemology outlined in the first principle by asking learners to rely on their senses to experience nature and write poetry about it. In addition, the assignment encourages the notion that understanding nature through experience is common sense. In part, the assignment accomplishes this by challenging the taxonomical epistemology of scientific writing. Moreover, poetry offers learners creative freedom and allows them to localize the activity by writing about their own experiences with nature. Finally, the creative allowances of poetry encourage learners to extend their language use beyond Standard American English and practice *englishes*. This should be highlighted in comparison to the communicative affordances that scientific writing offers learners.

The last pedagogical illustration (Table 3) focuses on presenting sustainability as common sense and challenging unsustainable narratives. As with the previous two activities, this illustration was designed for an EAP context, but, once again, this activity may be easily adapted to fit different learning contexts. The activity targets the notion that humans are inherently separate from the rest of the natural world, as humanity is often conceptualized outside of the animal kingdom, and human affairs are seen as separate from those of nature. To counter this narrative, the present activity aims at helping learners see themselves and humanity in general as part of the circle of life. In addition, to highlight the creative potential of art-related genres, learners will adapt a well-known
Table 3: Eco-CLA activity 3: Challenging unsustainable narratives.

The Circle of Life

This activity asks learners to study the message and genre characteristics of Elton John’s song *The Circle of Life*. In *The Lion King*, the song, as interpreted through the movie, introduces birth as a special event that connects the animal kingdom. The goal of the assignment is to help learners notice the interdependency between nonhuman animals referred to in the movie’s song. The assignment also prompts students to realize that humans are missing from the movie’s depiction of the circle of life. From this realization, learners can reframe the message of the song to fit the sustainable understanding that humans are part of nature, and their lives should sustain, rather than destroy, the lives of nonhuman animals. Moreover, this assignment offers learners the opportunity to challenge anthropomorphic depictions of nonhuman animals in popular media and to consider the effects of such representations on the way humans think about and interact with other animals.

1. The teacher plays *The Circle of Life* scene from *The Lion King* or the Broadway performance. Then, the teacher asks students to take 5 min to discuss in pairs the message of the song and how the video or Broadway performance helps to communicate this message. The teacher then asks students to share their ideas with the class.

2. Once the students have interpreted the song’s performance, the teacher builds on students’ ideas to show them that the song and its performance portrays the sustainable message that the animal kingdom is interconnected and interdependent. At this point, the teacher also discusses with learners the elements in the song and its performance that help to communicate the sustainable message; the goal is to help learners understand the rhetorical characteristics that make the song’s message effective. In addition, the teacher mentions that the song’s performance is partly compelling because it assigns human characteristics to nonhuman animals. The class then discusses why this is an appealing rhetorical move, but that it potentially represents nonhuman animal life in a problematic way through anthropomorphizing nonhuman animals. This activity could be adapted to other learning contexts by deemphasizing rhetorical characteristics and by emphasizing lexicogrammatical elements in the content material.

3. The teacher explains that genres such as songs, music videos, and Broadway performances allow for great creative flexibility. The teacher mentions *The Circle of Life* as an example of how genres, despite their formal characteristics, can allow for a great degree of creativity.

4. The teacher points out that the song’s video does not include humans as part of the circle of life. The teacher discusses with learners the effects of messages that separate humans from nature and nonhuman animals. At this point, the goal is to show how human separation from nature has had terrible consequences for the environment. This is also an opportunity to define and introduce the concept of the Anthropocene as an era in which human enterprise has failed to see the need for harmony between humans and nature.

5. Learners are placed in small groups and asked to re-write *The Circle of Life* in a way that includes humans into the circle of life. Of course, the new version must reflect the genre’s creative potential and, thus, encourage linguistic flexibility. Learners should have at least 15 min for this activity. In the end, the teacher asks the groups to share their new version of the song with the rest of the class.
song to fit the sustainable perspective advanced through this activity. Thus, the activity promotes a more sustainable interpretation of the relationships between humans and nature.

The last activity also fulfills eco-CLA principles outlined in this article. The activity presents birth, life, and death as physical realities that bound every creature, humans included. Thus, the activity introduces an epistemology of physicality as necessary to understanding the role of humanity in the world and to understanding how humans relate to other creatures. Moreover, the assignment seeks to make sustainability common sense. It tries to show learners that what they do directly affects nature and that they depend on nature for their survival. Moreover, it encourages a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature, a logic often contrary to human action. In addition, the assignment is localized by engaging a popular movie and a popular song, appealing to learners’ interests, and giving them the opportunity to problematize this popular depiction of nonhuman animal life. Finally, the creative nature of the genres engaged in the activity promotes *englishes* and the development of sustainable anglophone identities.

Though diverging in some sense from the previous assignments, there is also the potential to implement corpus-assisted activities within the eco-CLA framework. Such activities would enable students to identify and critique prevailing language patterns deemed destructive to ecological wellbeing and sustainability. Corpus-assisted activities could serve as platforms for a range of conversations of ecological relevance, as students are able to visualize how certain patterns of language use, whether deemed positive or negative for ecological wellbeing, function broadly within discourse. For example, in Poole (2022), students engage in activities focused on the use of *climate change* and *global warming*. In the activity, learners view an excerpt of the climate change documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, read an article from *The Guardian* regarding the change in use of the two terms, and then explore within the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008) how the frequency of use of the terms has shifted since the 1990s. Through identifying, analyzing, and reporting findings, students engage with how language use can shape our perceptions of issues of environmental importance.

In an additional contribution, Poole (forthcoming) more fully asserts the case for corpus-assisted eco-pedagogy. In the corpus-assisted activities, learners explore the varying representations of *wilderness* by identifying common adjective collocates used with the term; such an investigation could be reproduced through investigations of other eco-keywords such as trees, forests, animals, etc. The chapter also suggests means for exploring terms such as *disposable* that reflect single-use consumerist culture that contributes to ecological degradation. Finally, the chapter demonstrates how nominalizations such as *pollution* can be explored by learners to highlight language use practices that obscure and/or diffuse
responsibility for ecological harm. Such language-focused activities as made possible through corpus-assisted activities provide a platform to engage in ecocritical analysis and reflection of language of ecological importance.

5 Conclusion

The proliferation of English and its associated ideologies have an undeniable impact on the environment. As Delavan (2020) asserts, the current sustainability crisis speaks English. While we are certainly not the first to make such a call, we contend there is an urgent need for ELT to extricate itself from practices which perpetuate ecological degradation and to seek more eco-conscious practices and pedagogies that contribute positively to ecological wellbeing, sustainability, and justice. Without new forms of sustainable education, the “stories-we-live-by” (Stibbe 2015, 2021) which have manifested the present climate crises will continue to proliferate. As Halliday (2001 [1990]) once asserted, applied linguists (in which we include language educators), not just the chemists, biologists, and physicists, have a role to play in the formation of a more sustainable future. Language educators are well positioned to make meaningful contributions (Delavan 2020), and it is time for ELT practitioners to implement eco-critical pedagogical approaches to enable and empower language learners to shape a more just and sustainable future.

We acknowledge that as English language teachers we participate in and are embedded within the systems which have produced climate change and are therefore implicated in the crisis. Undeniably, we have operated within the stories enumerated by Stibbe (2015, 2021), yet we seek new ways of being in our personal and professional lives which can contribute positively to ecological wellbeing. Such work begins with ourselves as individuals and as language teachers. We, the authors, also recognize that as language teachers in the US we reside in a country whose citizens have contributed significantly to the ecological crisis, yet which has the economic resources to somewhat adapt to the effects of climate change. Additionally, the climate change refugees and language learners who would possibly be present in the classrooms in which such an eco-CLA pedagogy would be implemented in contrast have most likely contributed little to the crisis while being immensely impacted. We are cautious not to present ourselves as saviors, as possessors of the answers, as having the solutions to the crisis. We do though aim to acknowledge this positionality, recognize our role in regard to the crisis, and contribute in some positive way to a more sustainable and just world in which all humans and nonhumans can experience wellbeing. By operationalizing our background as applied linguists, ecolinguists, and language teachers, we hope to
bring our collection of skills and knowledge to a problem requiring contributions from all. Finally, we acknowledge that we draw mainly from US-based scholars. This is a shortcoming of our present work and one which we aim to address as we move forward in this space.

The pedagogical integration of ecolinguistics and CLA outlined and illustrated in our article offers a potential framework for realizing a sustainable approach to English language learning and use. The sample pedagogical activities illustrate the possibility of a more ecologically sustainable approach to English language teaching and learning. Indeed, many other eco-CLA activities that foster language acquisition while heightening learners’ ecological awareness are possible. The activities presented in this article utilize the affordances of various technologies from social media to corpora to encourage learners to engage critically with the issues and language use of ecological importance. However, the use of technologies for the development of sustainable pedagogy merits further empirical and theoretical exploration. At times, pedagogical discussions about technology praise the affordances of online spaces for achieving a range of language learning outcomes as if technology were the simple solution to all our educational challenges. Generally absent is careful consideration of how such implementation of technology in the classroom affects perceptions of and interactions with the natural world by learners. We are mindful that technology must be implemented with much care and thought, and we are wary that by promoting technologies and online worlds we simultaneously distance learners from the physical spaces of the natural world in their communities. In future research, we aim to further explore how online spaces and physical realities may be imagined as symbiotic ecosystems in which ecological awareness can be heightened and developed.

References


