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The search for new stories to live by: a summary of ten ecolinguistics lectures delivered by Arran Stibbe

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Abstract: This article is a summary of Professor Arran Stibbe’s ten online lectures on ecolinguistics at Beijing Foreign Studies University. The lecture series begins by asking: Why, from an ecolinguistic perspective, do we need new stories to live by? With theoretical insights and practical analyses of a wide range of discourses, it then illustrates how eight types of stories, including ideology, evaluation, erasure, salience, identity, narrative, framing, and metaphor can work cognitively to influence the way people construe reality, in the hope of encouraging people to use language that can inspire them to protect the planet instead of destroying it.

Keywords: discourse analysis; ecolinguistics; ecosophy; stories-to-live-by

1 Introduction

Arran Stibbe is Professor of Ecolinguistics at the University of Gloucestershire. His contribution to the interdisciplinary collaboration between linguistics, human ecology, and discourse analysis, in particular his founding of the International Ecolinguistics Association, has promoted theoretical development and practical investigations in the field of ecolinguistics. From June 5 to September 17, 2021, he was invited by the National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education and the National Research Centre for State Language Capacity at Beijing Foreign Studies University to give ten online lectures on ecolinguistics via Tencent meeting. Professor He Wei, Deputy Director of the National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education and the National Research Centre for State Language Capacity at Beijing Foreign Studies University, moderated the lectures and
extended a warm welcome to all the teachers and students who attended the lectures.

Although the lecture series was based on the second edition of *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By* (Stibbe 2021), it aimed at a more general and informed public than the few in academic circles. It also provided abundant examples and resources for research, some of which are newly acquainted by the audience, offering new theoretical insights into the fields of ecolinguistics and discourse analysis. The way Stibbe expounded his ideas to the audience – pithy and plain language, easy to follow – and the fresh ideas themselves had an overwhelming effect of feeling both thought-provoking and yet clear. The following summary of Professor Stibbe’s lectures, summarized by Chen Ma, is organized as follows: Section 2 is devoted to a detailed introduction of each lecture with every sub-section taking the title of that lecture, followed by Section 3, which is a brief conclusion.

2 Content of Professor Stibbe’s lectures

2.1 Ecolinguistics and the search for new stories to live by

“Ecolinguistics and the search for new stories to live by” is the first lecture as well as a general introduction to the series.¹ At the very beginning, Professor Stibbe asked a crucial question: From an ecolinguistic perspective, why do we need new stories to live by?

Professor Stibbe started the lecture by describing how a society driven by industrialization and continued growth is unsustainable, as we cannot continue growing so many crops to feed livestock, or having so many cars, consumption and waste for the society to last. Humans only have two possibilities: Either to transform our society into a sustainable one or to rebuild a new society by the people who survive the collapse of the current civilization (Bendell 2018). Either way, it needs a radical change in how we live, how our economy functions, and how we tell stories about our place on Earth (Klein 2014: 4). That is where language comes in. As Okri (1996: 21) notes, “stories are the secret reservoirs of values”. If we change the stories, we live by we change the individuals and nations themselves. The question addressed in the beginning can thus be answered: For ecolinguistics,

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¹ This lecture was also a keynote report in the Sixth Chinese Strategies Development Symposium on Ecolinguistics held by China Association of Ecolinguistics, the National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education and the National Research Centre for State Language Capacity at Beijing Foreign Studies University, and China University of Petroleum (Beijing) on July 5, 2021.
its tasks is to analyze the uses of language that shape our cultures, industrial and consumerist cultures in particular, to reveal the underlying stories that are ecologically destructive, and to search for more ecologically beneficial stories to live by.

The first step towards a search for new stories to live by is that we need to start thinking about the world in a different way. This can be done by going to cultures that cherish harmony between all of nature, like the traditional Chinese culture which permeates innate ecological wisdom from Confucian and Daoist philosophies. So, before any linguistic effort, ecolinguists need to first determine their own set of philosophical principles, or as Naess (1995) terms it, their “ecosophy”. The ecosophy can find the root in ecology, or in an appreciation of the discourse analysts’ culturally important beliefs that relate to an ecocentric worldview. For example, “ecological civilization” as a national policy of China can be taken by Chinese ecolinguists as their ecosophy to analyze discourses in a Chinese context. No matter what the ecosophy is, the gist is that it should be able to reflect the kind of world that the analyst wants to create, a world where respect and care for a bigger-than-the-self world are no longer a choice, but a necessity. The role of ecosophy is seen as the weighing scale between stories and the linguistic toolkit which helps to reveal them. To judge the stories as beneficial, destructive, or ambivalent, ecolinguists should use their ecosophy as an ethical tool for exposing the underlying message that stories convey. Based on the assessment of the ecosophy, all kinds of stories can be questioned from an ecological perspective: Do they encourage people to destroy or to protect the ecosystems?

In terms of stories to live by, there can be a lot of negative stories that have potentially harmful effects on the environment, the health and wellbeing of species, or the larger ecosystems. Some of them are told very often in our own cultures and even across the world. To name just a few, there are stories about “low sales are bad”, “humans are fundamentally selfish”, “meat is a symbol of national identity”, “rain, mist, and clouds are bad”, “pigs are machines” and “nature is unimportant in itself”. Once revealed, these destructive stories need to be resisted and replaced. Importantly, the fundamental task for ecolinguistics is not only to critique, but to provide new stories to engage people to cherish the intrinsic values of nature and life. “Nature is worthy of attention” can be one of the beneficial stories, in addition to “nature is fascinating”, “rain, mist, and cloud are good”, “happiness is a better measure of social progress than profit”. If the analyst judges the stories as positive, at the same time, he/she should promote it as a helpful way to think and talk about the world, so as to encourage educators, politicians, and everyone else to protect our planet.
2.2 Ideology and discourse

This lecture is about ideology theory and its application in discourse analysis. From an ecolinguistic perspective, ideology is a belief system or worldview shared by members of a particular group in society (Stibbe 2021: 21). Any group would have its unique ways of using language to encode its ideologies. What ecolinguists need to do is to analyze the features of language, unearth the ideologies covered by the linguistic features, and compare the ideologies to their ecosophy.

Nationalist discourse is a pertinent example of ideological discourse. Extracts (1)–(3) are quoted from British National Party (BNP) sources. It can be seen in these quotations, in particular the emphasized texts (in italics), that there is negative semantic prosody: People are divided by the creator of the article into an ingroup (British, indigenous) and an outgroup (hordes, alien and foreign) which includes immigrants, foreigners and those who might be born in Britain but happen to have ancestors from other countries. The negative connotations here explicitly convey a sense of “us versus them”, behind which is an ethnic nationalist ideology of asserting the interests of a dominant group to the exclusion of the interests of other groups. Such a worldview may encourage some people to strongly identify with their own nation, but at the same time, it can also lead to negativity towards people from other countries. Hence, as the extracts fail to promote respect and care for all people – which goes against the ecosophy – they should be judged as part of a destructive discourse. In the same vein, racist and sexist discourses are something negative that needs to be revealed by ecolinguists, and the ideologies underpinning them resisted.

(1) MASS IMMIGRATION CRISIS: Immigrant hordes heading for Soft-Touch Britain […] We will put British people first. (BNP, “Immigration Crisis Leaflet”)

(2) […] to hold back the hordes of Third World migrants clamoring to invade the British Isles […] (BNP, “Labour reveal plan to open immigration floodgates to Britain”)

(3) Multiculturalism is the eradication of the indigenous culture and being replaced by a hotchpotch of foreign and alien groups […] the BNP has campaigned for […] a return to the homogenous, indigenous British culture in Britain. (BNP, “Chairman Adam Walker responds to the New Zealand terror attack”)

The choice of lexicogrammar, metaphor, and narrative all play a role in ideological propaganda. Extracts (4)–(6) are headlines selected from The Sun newspaper.² As

² It was retrieved from https://www.thesun.co.uk/ (accessed December 31, 2021).
can be seen from the words used in the headlines, in between the lines there is a metaphor of “the immigrants are water” fueling an unashamedly xenophobic tension that “people from other countries are powerful force that is taking over the UK”. Here the metaphor is also seen in a larger narrative which consists of a sequence of discriminatory conceptions that “immigrants flood the UK, take British people’s job, take welfare money and commit crimes”. Such a storyline can commonly be seen in a range of right-wing British newspapers, where there permeates a view of “immigrants are unwelcome”, and a willful overlooking of the social and ecological problems that have created environmental refugees in the first place.

(4) Huge hike in number of migrants flooding UK.

(5) The tidal wave of poorer European migrants heading to Britain is going to soar.

(6) Fears of new migrant influx as 100 refugees arrive in Calais.

It is found that “humans are fundamentally selfish” is one of the ideologies that run across neoclassical economic textbooks. People are frequently categorized and represented as the producers (e.g. workers, investors, owners) and consumers whose main goal is to make more money. This ideology bases our world on human selfishness and espouses greed and vanity, rather than encouraging reciprocity and mutual trust between people. Moreover, influenced by the neoclassical economic point of view of economic rationality, the advertising industry has been trying to make us the greedy kind of people that economists assume we are. We can see many advertisements telling the story of “purchasing products is the path to happiness”, but very few say “money does not buy happiness”.

Professor Stibbe discussed a real poster advertisement for vitamin pills. The advertisement features a woman practicing yoga in the background, a bottle of vitamins in the foreground, in addition to a slogan that says “For the inner journey, take an alternative route”. This poster and the language on it fall into the destructive discourse category because they tell people to seek satisfaction through purchasing goods (in this case, the vitamin) rather than relaxing through the gentle meditation of yoga (which would not cost anything). Advertising this is very likely to push people to increase unnecessary shopping, which cannot make them truly satiated and happy. To help people resist the ultra-consumerist ideology, ecologists need to reveal the destructive story that “humans are innately selfish”, and more importantly, promote an alternative story that encourages people to think of each other as helpful, and their own happiness as part of the happiness of a larger group.
2.3 Evaluation

Evaluation is a form of story about whether an area of life is good or bad, which is typically manifested in appraisal patterns (Stibbe 2021: 17). As Halliday (2001 [1990]) emphasizes in his keynote speech to the International Association of Applied Linguistics, modernity is consistently appraising certain things as positive while others as negative, such as “more is better than less”, “big is better than small”, “grow is better than shrink”. What ecolinguistics is interested in is to reveal what areas of the world are constantly appraised as good/bad, and whether they are actually good/bad for people to protect the ecosystems.

Stibbe discovers several types of evaluations at the heart of today’s industrial civilization, like “economic growth is good”, “high retail sales are good” and “profits are good”. We can often see in the advertisement-full media and economic news that increased sales are appraised as “good news”, “welcome news” (Guardian); “boom”, “reward” (BBC); and something to be the “best”, “strongest” and “golden” (Telegraph). Falling profits, on the other hand, tend to be negatively reported as “appalling”, “slump” (Daily Mail); “gloomy”, “worries” (Reuters); “worst”, “dismal”, “decline” (Evening Standard). However, there is no clear evidence that the higher the gross domestic product (GDP), the higher the national happiness. But it is obvious that economic growth can lead to anthropogenic ecological destruction. Thus, it can be said that the “economic-growth-is-good” type of evaluation is not a desirable story to live by.

Similarly, “success is good”, “progress is good”, “fast is good”, “big is good” and “more is good” are all appraisal patterns that encourage growth-obsessed consumerism. To resist the tendency towards reckless and unsustainable development, new evaluations need to be found and promoted. For example, noticing that the western culture is obsessed with bigness – big cars, a big amount of food, and in particular meat – Stibbe suggests that ecolinguists need to help reclaim the positive appraisal of smallness. The reason can be summed up by a quote from Schumacher’s (1975 [1973]) book titled Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered:

For his different purposes, man needs many different structures, both small ones and large ones [...] It is therefore necessary to insist on the virtues of smallness [...], (Schumacher’s 1975 [1973]: 66)

Somebody else that has a similar idea is Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist and activist scholar, who keep re-invigorating the devalued notion of smallness in her book by collocating the word “small” with words like “farmers” (4 tokens), “peasant(s)” (3 tokens), “farms” (2 tokens), “plant” (1 token), among many others,
so as to disenchant her readers from the spell of mass farming and industrial monocultures (cf. Alexander 2009: 124–125).

Advertisements in the meat and dairy industry also contain many harmful evaluations. Stibbe finds that many of the commercials are emotionally manipulating people by selling the stories of “farms are nice places”, “eating meat is masculine” and “eating meat is a path to happiness”, all of which attempt to leave us with an impression that consuming animal products is a very positive event and that we should do more of it.

To create beneficial evaluations for the way we consume food, Stibbe has worked with Greenpeace, an independent environmental organization, to help design a campaign that goes after a vegan lifestyle. As can be seen in the campaign slogans (see Figure 1), the word “less” is constantly collocated with “meat”, and “more” with all the positive things labeled in green color like “health”, “veggie”, “life” and “taste”, which is an attempt to emphasize that vegan food are much healthier and more environmentally friendly options than meat is.

### 2.4 Erasure

Language can be used to focus on some particular aspects or angles of incidences while marginalizing others. Whenever a story comes out, a critical reader should be able to notice not only what is explicitly represented, but also what is backgrounded, excluded, or erased. With the word “erasure”, Stibbe says that his emotion to it is attached to some slight sadness because it means that something important has disappeared. As Stallmeyer and Dearborn (2020) note:

First, erasure is an act of deleting or ‘removing something completely’ [...] A second meaning of erasure is the trace left behind by the attempt to erase. As in writing, erasing something results in marks – physical erasures – that remain on the page. (Stallmeyer and Dearborn 2020: 347)

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3 This figure is taken from https://wayback.archive-it.org/9650/20200923225726/https://lessismore.greenpeace.org/ca_ENG/ (accessed December 31, 2021).
Once it becomes clear that a discourse is removing something important, what ecolinguists need to do is to bring that thing back to our attention. There are, of course, a million things which are erased in our daily use of language, but among them, what is truly important and should be brought back to our minds will depend on the values and interests of ourselves as an ecolinguistic practitioner. For ecolinguists, one thing they should certainly recognize is that “something important” that has been increasingly erased today is the natural world around us. Hence, one focus of ecolinguistics is to reveal and resist the language which is used to erase nature through the systemic absence, backgrounding, or distortion of plants, animals, rivers, forests, and the physical environment.

According to the analyst’s personal research interests and ecosophy, he/she can investigate the erasure of other important things in the world, too. An example in this case is provided by Namaste (2000: 52), who uses the term “erasure” to describe how transgendered people are expelled from the texts where male and female seem to be the only two possibilities. By talking just about men and women, many discourses that we encounter and create every day reject the existence of those people who are assigned a female (male) sex at birth but have a male (female) sense of self. This kind of erasure is termed by Stibbe (2021: 229) as “the void”, which means that something important is present in reality but is made entirely absent in discourses.

Another type of erasure is called “the trace”, which means something important is present in reality but only has a hint or indirect reference to it in discourses (Stibbe 2021: 229). Imagine if we try to rub some pencil marks off, often we can still see the trace of the letters after they are rubbed out – that is what Stallmeyer and Dearborn (2020: 347) mean by saying “the trace left behind by the attempt to erase”. We can see this type of erasure even in discourses that tell beneficial stories, for instance, in the report of Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to an analysis of this document conducted by Valvason (2021), there are 274 tokens and 44 types of mentions of humans, and they are most frequently realized by items like “people” (64 tokens), “women” (32 tokens), and “girls” (15 tokens). In sharp contrast, words that refer to animals (e.g. “species”, “wildlife”, “livestock”) and plants (e.g. “plants”, “forest”, “seeds”) only appear 14 times each. This seems to imply that the non-human life forms are much less important than humans are and that they are only the resources for utilization by humans. It can thus be said, overall, the United Nation’s Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development partly erases nature.

The last type of erasure is “the mask”, which means something important is erased and replaced with a distorted version of itself. Anthropomorphism is an obvious example, as we can often see animals represented as wearing clothes,
standing on two legs, talking, and living in house like humans do. Through this, the animal behaviors are ascribed to human behaviors, and thus the animals’ characteristics are distorted and blurred. Similarly, the representation of “happy animals” can sometimes be quite misleading, in particular in the advertisements of animal products where animals are always happily “selling” the end products of the brutal processes they have endured in the factory.

Stibbe suggests that one way to help people revalue the existence of animals and plants is to use less of the non-living hypernyms to refer to them. That is, discourse creators can advisedly reduce the use of expressions such as “our resources” and “the natural capital” to talk about nature and non-human creatures. The more vivid names of the species, such as “oak”, “beech”, “badgers” and “seals”, can be used if the storyteller intends to make the audience feel strongly attached to the individuality of that particular life that is being talked about. For example, if the author wants to remind the reader of a real badger – its color, smell, and the way it moves – then he/she can reject abstract descriptions such as ‘wildlife’ or the pronoun ‘it’, and uses the expressions ‘badger’, “he” or “she” instead.

2.5 Salience

In contrast to erasure, salience is a form of story which depicts an area of life as being important and worthy of consideration (Stibbe 2021: 17). Viewed from a psycholinguistic perspective, salience is “the property of a stimulus to stand out from the rest”, and the salient items “are more likely to be perceived and […] to enter into subsequent cognitive processing and learning” (Ellis 2017: 71). Linguistically, to make something salient means that the thing needs to be talked about in a way that is clear, prominent, and concrete, as an attempt to capture the recipient’s attention and concern to this thing. Hence, one important step towards guiding people to care and to protect nature will be creating more salient linguistic patterns for the more-than-human world.

Macfarlane and Morris’s (2017) book The Lost Words: A Spell Book is full of illustrations of how to creatively use salience patterns to appreciate nature. As can be seen in Figure 2, the authors of the book provide a picture where a kingfisher is standing out in the center of a plain background. Next to it, there is a cleverly composed poem where the first letter of each line combines to spell out the word “kingfisher”. In between the lines, many linguistic features give salience to the kingfisher, as can be seen from the words that the poet uses to describe the color and voice of the little bird, and the way it moves and acts. Obviously, these efforts
are purposefully made to allow the reader to learn the unique appearance, characteristics, and habits of the lovely creature, and thus to cherish its beauty of it.

One thing that is highly relevant to the salience pattern is the skill of “re-minding”. An illustration of re-minding can be found in Plumwood’s (2008) paper about the “shadowlands”. Plumwood critically points out that an ecological re-conception of a clean and nice place to dwell has to include the recognition that such a place exists only because there are “shadow places” elsewhere. In her own words:

So ecological thought […] must […] reflect on how nice (north) places and shadow (south) places are related, especially where north places are nice precisely because south places are not so nice. (Plumwood 2008: 139)

Here, Plumwood’s message is clear: Don’t forget about the shadowlands; do care about where the goods come from (the developing countries and areas where people are exploited and the environment destroyed). By citing this text, Stibbe attaches emphasis to reminding people of the importance and value of what is

Figure 2: A poem and a picture of kingfisher.4

being erased, such as the “shadowlands” in this case, and to make it linguistically salient.

Another example of a positive salience pattern is found in the website of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). In a text about chickens, PETA writes:5

(7) They are very social and like to spend their days together, scratching for food, taking dust baths, roosting in trees, and lying in the sun. (PETA, “Chickens used for food”)

In Extract (7), chickens are the grammatical and psychological subjects of all the verbs (are, like, spend, scratching, taking, roosting, lying). By this, chickens are represented as the Actors and Sensors of the processes, which implies that they are leading their own material and mental lives for their own purposes, and that their needs and interests need to be protected.

In terms of visual representations, it is normally the case that when we think of chickens in factory farms, we think of an image of hundreds of mass-raised chickens who are powerless, idling their time, not thinking or doing anything. Images like this are erasing the individuality and subjectivity of the chickens and are thus negative. To give chickens (and other animals) salience and encourage people to remember that they are lively, inquisitive, and intelligent creatures, the animals can be represented using a level camera angle to imply equality and empathy, or from a low camera angle to make them appear more powerful. This is helpful to promote care and respect for animals from a de-anthropocentric point of view, and ultimately change the inhumane and brutal ways that animals have long been treated.

2.6 Identity and Men’s Health magazine

In an ecolinguistic definition, identity is a form of a story about what it means to be a particular kind of person (Stibbe 2021: 17). The sociologist Giddens (1991: 54) notes that identity is to be found in a person’s capacity to keep a particular narrative going, or more specifically, a “story about the self”. In this lecture, entitled “Identity and Men’s Health magazine”, one type of identity is specifically introduced, namely self-identity. Self-identity is a story people tell themselves and others about what kind of person they are. Self-identity evolves, as we may have different expectations in different stages of our lives about what kind of

person we want to be. Language is a crucial way to change the story of who we are as people.

As has been mentioned earlier, industrial civilization is trying to forge and shape people’s self-identities into consumers. The consumerist identity can often have very negative impacts on the way we live, like encouraging people to buy environmentally damaging products, eating lots and lots of meat, and purchasing a lavish lifestyle while feeling entitled. In research on *Men’s Health* magazine, Stibbe investigates how consumerist identities are set up by the linguistic and visual features of the magazine. Before getting directly to the analysis, the background information is introduced: In general, men have a significantly shorter life expectancy than women do. This cannot be explained simply by biology. An empirical study conducted by Courtenay (2000) shows that there are 30 behaviors in which men have greater involvement in high-risk unhealthy behaviors than women, like smoking, drinking alcohol, and overeating meat. In the promotion of men’s unhealthy lifestyle, language definitely has a role, because, in our societies, men are more or less encouraged by language to behave masculinely.

It is almost self-evident that as a lifestyle magazine that features a lot of fashion and shopping tips, *Men’s Health* has the goals of making profits, selling advertising space, and encouraging buying. However, as shopping and fashioning are more of female activities, it can be said that the magazine is not selling that kind of “masculinity” as the word is stereotypically understood. Noticing this, Stibbe has particularly examined the magazine covers and found that *Men’s Health* has compensated for this by constantly using cover pictures loaded with extreme, hegemonic masculine characters. That would be underpinned by a male identity popular in western cultures that praises strength, violence, and hormonal charisma. But these representations can arouse anxiety about male body image, as they manifest the ideal men only as the ones who have enormous muscles. In the inner pages, cars are often represented in a similar way – huge, powerful, fierce, and chunky. As Barthel (1992: 144) describes, “as the juxtaposition of shape and power suggests, the car is not simply the Other. It is also an extension of the owner”. Through this, the reader is encouraged to buy masculine things, many of which are the things that they do not really need, like big cars which burn masses of petrol.

The texts in *Men’s Health* can often have ecologically destructive connotations, too.

Let’s imagine you are a short, bald accountant with no abs […] Don’t expect a great car to turn you into El Duque or Brad Pitt of any combination thereof. But of will bring you a little closer.
Extract (8) is a case in point, in which the act of “buying a great car” is directly associated with the increase of masculinity. The dissatisfaction of being ordinary (short, bald accountant with no abs) in comparison to the expectation of being more manly can potentially drive the readers towards linking male identity with buying certain products.

2.7 Ecological identity in native American writing

This lecture uses positive discourse analysis to analyze the construction of ecological and ecocultural identity in a book by Luther Standing Bear. Stibbe describes three levels of identity. Firstly, individual identity focuses on the importance of people in isolation. Secondly, social identity is where individuals are seen as part of a larger group of humans. Finally, ecocultural identity, where people belong to groups that include not only other humans but also other things to be found in the natural world.

A study of indigenous cultures is an efficient way to search for stories where humans see themselves and nature as an inseparable whole. This is because usually in indigenous civilizations, people can only survive in interactions with the wildlife and lands around them, and so they care about and protect nature. And when people see themselves as part of a larger group than just humans, they will “take action, or formulate their personality based on their ecological worldview” (Tomashow 1996: 4).

Stibbe specifically introduces Standing Bear’s (2006) book *Land of the Spotted Eagle* to illustrate how ecocultural identities can be linguistically constructed. This book describes the customs, manners, and traditions of Native American people. In his analysis, Stibbe has applied a simple and yet pertinent ecosophy: Care! The exclamation mark indicates that care is something that is valuable and needs to be encouraged. It is caring for people, other species, future generations, and the wider ecosystems that lives depend on. Practically, this ecosophy is used to evaluate whether the stories in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* encourage people to respect/care or to disregard/harm others. The theoretical framework is Martin’s (2004) Positive Discourse Analysis, which focuses on the positive aspect of language use. Hence, the research question is addressed: What linguistic features in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* perform positive ecocultural identities?

Findings suggest that, firstly, in the book, individuals are represented as something important but always part of a larger group. As Standing Bear (2006: 69) writes: “There must be no hungry individuals; so long as one had food, all would have food”, here the connotation is that individual is not the only thing that
matters, rather, a person should always identify him/herself as part of a social group. Another example is as follows:

(9) The medicine-man was a true benefactor of his people in that his work was founded upon and promoted the Indian ideal of brotherhood, and all service rendered to fellow beings was for the good of the tribe. (Standing Bear 2006: 203)

In Extract (9), Standing Bear uses the positive term (benefactor), category inclusion (fellow beings), kinship frame (brotherhood), and collective noun (tribe), all of which cultivate a sense of group belongingness, love, needs, esteem and care for others and one’s own social identity.

Moreover, in building the ecological identities of the indigenous people, Standing Bear uses many expressions that describe humans and other beings as a unity. Extracts (10)–(12) illustrate how the Native American people are perceived as members of the category creatures, beings, and earth entities, all of which are superordinate terms. On the other hand, the Indian, animals, and plants are implied as coexisting equally in a hyponym relation. The use of the words like fellow and other further enhances the implication that humans, other forms of life, and the physical environment are all part of a larger ecosystem, suggesting mutually respectful and dependent relationships between humans and nature.

(10) The character of the Indian’s emotion left little room in his heart for antagonism toward his fellow creatures. (Standing Bear 2006: 195)

(11) By acknowledging the virtues of other beings the Lakota came to possess them for himself. (Standing Bear 2006: 204)

(12) In order to place himself in communication with the other earth entities the Lakota submitted to the purification ceremony. (Standing Bear 2006: 204)

In addition, the kinship frame is found used many times throughout the book. Examples include “kinship and unity of life” (Standing Bear 2006: 186–187), “kinship to other lives” (Standing Bear 2006: 192), “all things were kindred” (Standing Bear 2006: 193), and “kinship with other orders of life” (Standing Bear 2006: 202). By this, the author is directly setting up kinship relationship between the indigenous people and the non-human world. A less direct way of framing kinship is through metaphor. As can be seen in Extract (13), the emphasized words trigger the metaphor where the source domain is “family” and the target domain is “the community of life”. Similarly, it is found that the frames of friendship, commonality, and closeness are widely used across the book. All of the above efforts
are against the story of human exceptionalism, and helpful to establish ecological identities in a pleasant way.

(13) For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue. (Standing Bear 2006: 193)

It is also found that Standing Bear’s writing is full of spatial metaphors (“humans are closed to nature”), personification (in the sense that “animals are respected as people”), among many other positive ways of language uses that resolve human-nature separation. Finally, in his concluding remarks, Stibbe comments that the writing “is done with the greatest of respect and reverence for beings from the more-than-human world and brings them into the heart of the human community”.

2.8 Environment and language in TESOL books in Japan

Stibbe starts this lecture by sharing with the audience some of his personal experiences of life in Japan. Japan is where he learned about ecology. The communities that old Japanese people in the countryside were living in were very ecological. They would grow fruits, share the fruits with others, and walk into nature to gather plants and seaweeds, living their lives naturally and organically. They also liked to make things out of natural or leftover materials. An old Japanese lady once told Stibbe that she was unwilling to kill insects, because insects are a manifestation of life, just as cats, monkeys, and humans are.

The care for neighbors and nature that Stibbe discovered in rural Japan motivated him to teach about the environment in his TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) classes. However, he found that the textbooks available at the time, which were written by US and UK authors for use in Japan, were unengaging and only gave a surface-level treatment of ecological issues. That’s when Stibbe decided to turn to ecolinguistics to analyze the textbooks and to make out what was wrong with them. In the 26 environmental textbooks that he analyzed, he discovered that although they were supposed to be about ecology, they erased nature by using human-centered language (cf. Stibbe 2004).

For the purpose of presenting this research, in this lecture, Stibbe introduces his most renowned ecosophy, namely “Living!”. In general, this ecosophy is about respecting, celebrating, and valuing the lives of humans and other species, and reducing consumption to allow a sustainable future. As Leopold (1949: 214) points out, “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in”. The purpose of this research is, therefore, to
reveal how plants, animals, forests, waters, soil, rain, and the physical environment are represented in the textbooks.

The first thing worth noticing is the erasure and salience patterns in the textbooks. It is found that phrases like “timber resources” are used to denote forests, “live shipments” to animals who are being transported by ships, and “marine life” to creatures and plants in the sea. These abstract expressions are giving low salience to the non-human lives as if they are just something out there, not doing much for humans. The pronoun “their” in the expression “what humans do with their biological resources” frames animals and plants as a procession of humans. The uses of “products” and “fishing industry” describe species as only having commercial values to humans. Low salience and high erasure patterns as such fail to capture the idea that animals and plants are lively beings as humans are, and that each of them has its own unique personality and intrinsic values for people to appreciate and protect.

In addition, it is found that many of the appraisal patterns and identities used in the textbooks are constantly promoting a consumerist identity instead of an ecological identity, as in Extracts (14) and (15):

(14) Simply stated, cars offer fun and freedom […] the allure of the automobile is its promise of escape. (Evanoff et al. 1999: 11)

(15) An office worker may go to work in somber clothes, but on weekends he or she drives a dashing sports car […] the car has released that person’s inner self! (Randle et al. 1997: 7)

We will expect that these textbooks will be encouraging us not to use cars that much but to walk and to cycle instead, but it turns out that the cars are typically evaluated as something highly positive. As can be seen in Extract (14), cars are described as something offering “fun”, “freedom” and a “promise of escape”, and thus a story is given: “Cars are good”. This should not be a helpful evaluation to make people realize that cars are always polluting, no matter how efficient they are. Extract (15) is more like a car advertisement instead of a quote from an environmental textbook in that it describes cars as a symbol of the owner’s personality, as if you buy this car, you become this type of person. The connotation behind the message can be negative towards consumerism.

Now we have to think about why the environmental textbooks written in the west are so negative when it comes to the environment, and why they encourage people to buy so many things. To find the root of this question, we need to go back to the essence of TESOL. TESOL is globally promoted by countries like the UK and the USA to encourage people from different countries to speak English, get a friendly feeling about these English-speaking countries, and eventually, buy
English or American products. The TESOL textbooks often contain a message that British and American cultures are wonderful while the local cultures are somewhat backward, and thus the target readers need to adopt a more British or American way of consumer lifestyle. Acknowledging this, Stibbe suggests that TESOL teachers could use ecolinguistics to critically examine the destructive stories in the textbooks, rather than just taking them as if those are the ways that things are, and ultimately, direct the students to be aware of the negative impact of such stories.

2.9 Japanese haiku and animation

In this lecture, Japanese haiku poems and animation are introduced and analyzed as valuable sources of data from which we can search for new stories to restructure how nature is conceived.

Haiku is an ancient form of Japanese short poetry with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count, often focusing on images from nature. Profoundly influenced by Indian Buddhism and Chinese Daoism, Zen Buddhism permeates the traditional Japanese culture and Japanese haiku. Matsuo Basho, the most famous haiku poet who trained in Zen, was the first who brought the spirit of Zen into haiku. Example (16) is Basho’s most renowned poem:


What this poem describes are an ordinary pond and an ordinary frog, but as readers, we can sense a direct connection between the poet and nature, and a real appreciation of nature. Everything is just simple and natural, showing how nature is.

Language constructs the world in artificial ways. What Zen attempts to do is to transcend the limits of language and intellectual abstraction to appreciate the unmediated experience of the world. That is, to go beyond language and interact directly with nature itself. In haiku poetry, we can see many manifestations of this. Extract (17) is a haiku written by Yosa Buson:

(17) 　女郎花（ominaeshi, ‘The ominaeshi’) 　そもそも入り（somokeinagara, ‘The stems as they are’) 　花ながら（hananagara, ‘The flowers as they are’)

Ominaeshi is a kind of flower that we would easily find by the sides of the road. With only a few words, the poet writes about Ominaeshi’s natural state, showing
an appreciation of things for what they naturally are. By this, a message just flows through: Nature is important in itself.

Another work that Stibbe has done is to search for all the animal items in Kobayashi Issa’s haiku. It is found that a wide range of animals is described in Issa’s poems including butterfly, cuckoo, dog, dragonfly, duck, goose, mouse – the list is very long – all of which are the ordinary creatures that we may find around us. But there is no lion, tiger, panda, elephant, and other animals that can’t be seen in ancient Japan. Interestingly enough, there is no abstract term like “animal”, “living thing” and “plants”, that is, there is always a direct representation of an animal and a plant. That gives great salience to the one particular life, as the readers can vividly imagine how it looks like, how it lives its own life, and thereby value the beauty of it.

Also found in Issa’s haiku is a constant story of ecological identity. As can be seen in the haiku in (18), a strong sense of identity hinges around the word も (mo, ‘too’), as it conveys the idea that humans and cherry blossoms are identical in having a short but precious life.

(18) さく花や (sakuhanaya, ‘Cherry blossoms’) ここ住居も (konotoshiuukyomo, ‘Residents of this world, too’)
     今少し (imasukoshi, ‘A short time’)

Besides haiku, another uniquely styled form of Japanese art that is globally recognized is Japanese animation. One worldwide popular animation film called となりのトトロ (tonarinototoro, ‘My Neighbor Totoro’) is a particularly appropriate example to illustrate how to create vivid representations of nature as something benign, beautiful, and worthy of respect. In the film, every little thing in nature is hand-drawn in detail and color in natural, muted tones, aside from small splashes of color, usually flowers, which are dotted here and there. In many scenes, the human structures blend in with the natural environment, as they are represented as being right there in the middle of nature, made with natural materials like woods and stones. The main character Totoro, who is the Keeper of the Forest, is a manifestation of a nature spirit – he is large, cuddly, and kind but appears slightly monster-like, representing the wild side of nature too. Thus, the salience of Totoro is the salience of the beauty, magic, and authentic power of nature. Totoro is generally friendly and kind, which is shown as he helps the human protagonists to grow, and he is also a good leader who implements changes in the environment and teaches people what their responsibilities are without words. Just by looking at these purely visual forms of representations, the recipient can easily feel the affiliation of humans with nature. Behind such a feeling is a very different story to that offered by an unsustainable industrial civilization which causes us to disregard the natural world around us.
2.10 Narratives of the creation of the world

This lecture starts with a slide presentation that introduces an article published on the website of the World Economic Forum entitled “We Must Move from Egocentric to Ecocentric Leadership to Safeguard Our Planet”. This article is not something that we would normally expect to see in an economic forum, and it is a good example for us to figure out what counts as a more positive narrative of economic issues. Narrative is a story that involves a sequence of logically connected events (Stibbe 2021: 17). Within this article, there is a clear narrative structure that starts with the current state of ecological destructiveness. It then identifies the goal, that is, to move towards a society that safeguards the environment. Finally, it offers an entailment – the reader should become an ecocentric leader.

In creating this narrative text with its beneficial stories, metaphors are used. For example, from Extracts (19) – (21) we can see a metaphor of “movement from one place to another place”. This metaphor implies that the old, destructive egocentric view of nature is where we need to get away from, and new, ecological leadership is where we need to concentrate.

(19) We must move from egocentric to ecocentric leadership to safeguard our planet.

(20) We must shift the way we view and relate to nature.

(21) shift out focus from rights to responsibilities – from “What can nature do for me?” to “What can I do for nature?”

Alongside the text, there is a diagram (see the picture part in Figure 3) that vividly instantiates this movement metaphor. The visual features line up with the linguistic features in the text and emphasize the narrative. This is where we start to get into the main topic of this lecture – the creation and origin stories of the world. The same image used in the World Economic Forum article also appears in numerous other places online. In one place it has two texts below the image. On the left-hand side is a Bible quotation that positions humans above animals. On the right-hand side is another text that is a quote from a physics professor and cosmologist, Lawrence Krauss.

Let’s first look at the Genesis narrative from which the extract on the left was taken. This narrative is highly structured as it has a clear series of events that occur

7 This figure is taken as a public domain photo from Flickr (https://www.flickr.com).
in a day-by-day linear order, talking about what happened as the world was created. In different versions of the *Bible*, the narrative texts of the story of Genesis may be differently expressed. Compare Extracts (22) and (23):

(22) *Fill* the Earth and subdue it. *Rule* over the fish in the sea and the *birds* in the sky and over every *living creature* that *moves* on the ground.

(23) *Replenish* the earth, and subdue it: and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the *fowl* of the air, and over every *living thing* that *moveth* upon the *Earth*.

As can be seen, these two extracts use many different words to talk about the same thing, such as *fill/replenish, rule/have dominion, birds/fowl*. Regardless of the specific words that are used, the underlying narrative structures are the same, and the entailments are identical – humans are exceptional and superior. To comment on this entailment, White (1967: 1205) critiques that Christianity is negatively anthropocentric because “God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule; no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes”.

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*Figure 3:* Two ways of seeing ourselves in relation to the rest of the natural world (Stibbe 2021: 193).
On the other hand, scientific discourse describes ideas about the origin of the university that is supported by evidence. But in telling the origin story, scientists have to select which events, characters, and places to focus on and which ones to ignore. The emerging story is a particular sequence of events, so scientific texts are still narratives. Stibbe describes one example of the origin story from a science website and finds a very different narrative to the Bible one. This first event in this particular scientific narrative structure is the big bang. What follows are the formations of stars, solar system, organic molecules, and then the evolution of eukaryotic life, the domination of dinosaurs, the evolution of small mammals, and to date, the rise of human civilization. Extract (24) is a passage from a science website for illustration:8

(24) But the small furry mammals that burrowed underground survived. They had been living in the shadows of the dinosaurs all along, but with the dinosaurs gone, they could now thrive and grow in size. They became the new rulers of the Earth. Eventually the mammalian lineage evolved into primates, then apes, then hominids, and finally the Homo lineage that produced human beings. (Briggs, “Big bang to civilization: 10 amazing origin events”)

In this extract, events are linked by temporal indicators like had, all along, now, eventually, and then, showing the appearance of humans as a stage in a long sequence of evolution. However, the expression the mammalian lineage evolved into primates erases other mammals that evolved after the dinosaurs, and the word finally seems to denote that human is the endpoint of evolution. So overall, this is not a beneficial narrative to promote.

To counter the kind of entailment that “human beings are the last and best species of evolution”, an alternative narrative is introduced. Extract (25) is selected from an article in an educational project of the University of California, alongside which is a diagram (see Figure 4).9

(25) It is tempting to see evolution as a grand progressive ladder with Homo sapiens emerging at the top. But evolution produces a tree, not a ladder – and we are just one of many twigs on the tree. (Berkeley, “Trends in evolution”)

In this passage, the given (old) narrative structure can be generalized by an “evolution is a ladder” metaphor. This old narrative is a story that is commonly

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expressed: Life before humans became increasingly complex and the final result is, the human, is the most advanced and complex being to have evolved. Importantly, scientists and educators need to direct people towards a new metaphor “evolution is a tree”, where humans and other life forms exist equally as the twigs on an enormous tree – no better, no worse. As the narratives of the origins of life and the universe are immensely important for our sense of our places on Earth, it is particularly meaningful for ecolinguists to reveal the entailments of these narratives, to question them, asking how they influence the way we perceive other people, animals, plants, and the ecosystems we live by.

3 Conclusion

This paper presented a summary of each of Professor Arran Stibbe’s ten ecolinguistic lectures at Beijing Foreign Studies University, which was summarized by Chen Ma. It highlights the major contents of these lectures in terms of the theoretical and practical contributions that Stibbe has made to the development of ecolinguistics. Specifically, each lecture has shown how to use an ecosophy and linguistic theories to analyze language features and the stories they convey, including ideology, evaluation, erasure, salience, identity, narrative, framing, and metaphor, and thereby reveal their beneficial or destructive impacts on the health of both the planet and its inhabitants. The lectures encourage us to be careful with

the words we choose to describe the world as a web of sustaining relationships of humans with each other, other organisms, and the physical environment, and in doing so resist violent, prejudiced, and self-centered ways of seeing our world. By implication, stories that work towards well-being and social justice for humans and care for the ecosystems that support life are the kind of stories which we need to promote and celebrate, so that our societies can be set on a fair, ethical, sustainable path out of social turmoil and ecological crisis.

In general, the lecture series was a success both in a sense of academic exchange and as an effort in the promotion of an ecological way of thinking and acting. As Stibbe (2021: x) states, “ecolinguistics is not just an area of academic inquiry, but a way of life”. Ultimately, the hope is for researchers, policymakers, and the general public to find and use their own ecosophy to evaluate the stories that life depends on, and thereby choose ecologically beneficial stories to live by, making the world a better place for all and leading to a sustainable future.

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