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## **Relational Eco linguistics and Speculative Fabulations**

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### **Abstract**

With rising portmanteaux such as Ecosophy and ecolinguistics, a significant trend that aims to blend ecology with multiple disciplines continues to be on the ascent since the last century. The recent challenge to the anthropocentric worldview is a crucial motivation for such blends. With the upheaval of "genetic information," the information system that formerly bolstered and maintained anthropocentrism is now challenging its tenets. The term eco refers to the critical relationships between humans and nonhumans, between microscopic and macroscopic worlds. Ecolinguistics studies the relation between eco and how we communicate about ecological entities and processes. Many studies have revealed how language and communication influence the environment and its nonhuman inhabitants. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA henceforth), for instance, has exposed the role of language in reducing and promoting racism, social inequalities, and sexism. In a larger framework, Ecosophy provides intellectual and empirical insights that can give succinct access to unmuted communications in a more-than-human world by participating in more-than-mammal philosophies of survival, living, and dying. The paper will explore Donna Haraway's notion of SF (an abbreviation for speculative fabulations, string figures, speculative philosophy, and situated feminism) and Gregory Bateson's relational thesis of

"double descriptions" to unite 'eco' and 'language' with each other. This will be done by suggesting alternative ways of approaching CDA and possible linguistic renovations (for instance, Prof. S. Veeramani's notion of relexifying terms to promote environmental sensitivity and awareness).

## **Introduction**

Transcending anthropocentrism in multiple disciplines is an emerging trend in our knowledge production. It is not just a theoretical but also an existential moment where such transcendence occurs. A signature of the same has classical roots in various oriental philosophical schools and religions, but its modern version is primarily based on scientific and ecological thinking. Scientific thinking is well known to us owing to its presence in almost every quotidian dimension of our living. Scientific thinking is known to be repulsive of normatively; however, to follow this trend holistically, we must ask an important question - what is ecological thinking? The German biologist Ernst Haeckel described the notion of ecology and also coined the same term for the very first time:

By ecology, we mean the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigations of total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment, including, above all, its friendly and damaging ties with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly in contact. (Hughes 7)

The intertwining of living and non-living, human and nonhuman environment is the subject matter of ecology. Ecological thinking considers various conditions and networks responsible for the existence and functioning of a particular phenomenon. Unlike scientific thought, it becomes normatively active in taking relationships to the center. While natural ecology is rich with geographical diversity, ecological thinking in a similar tone takes particularities of epistemic and ontological relations into account. Such thinking can scale various disciplinary and social artifacts and study their theoretical and experimental consequences. To give a taste of ecological thinking, a recent paper published by the Santa Fe Institute shows that some colleges are mammals, and others are like cities (Phys Org).

What does ecological thinking imply? Environmental thinking has consequences for epistemological (theory of knowledge) and disciplinary (field of expertise). One of the most radical aspects of such thinking is the denial of many scientific and Western ways of thinking about relationships and nature. Lorraine Code has observed that Anglo-American epistemology seeks to determine:

...the particularities of epistemic location or the purposes of specific epistemic projects. Such epistemologies have commonly modeled their inquiries on simple, everyday sensory perceptions of "medium-sized" physical objects or stylized, idealized conceptions of science and the scientific method. Typically, too, they presuppose an autonomous,

rational, adult, individual knower who is everyone and no one but whose identity is epistemologically irrelevant. (146-147)

The knower and the known in such an epistemology gain relevance by justifying both a priori and normative standards. It scales not only mesoscopic entities but also designs microscopic entities for mesoscopic ends. The medium-sized objects are then constructed through a mesoscopic terrain of epistemic boundaries of rationality which a particular kind of adult human endows at a specific level of health and autonomy. This methodology divides the knower from the known and arrests ecological thinking that seeks to nip this method in the bud. Ecolinguistics is an interdisciplinary venture that is grounded in environmental thought. Linguistics at large can be viewed from three perspectives:

1. Independent
2. Structural
3. Ecological

Independent linguistics suggests that it is meant for cognition and is independent of social and environmental contexts. Structural linguistics offers that the world as we know it and experience it is constructed by language. Ecological linguistics suggests that language is deeply interconnected, making it a constructor of the world and something built by the world. Amongst the three, ecolinguistics has the possibility of carrying radical propositions and methods to tackle the theoretical and environmental crisis we are going through, which challenges many

epistemological definitions and standards opted by other views (Stibbe).

### **Ecolinguistics**

Ecolinguistics focuses on how language sculpts our environmental commitments (i.e., carving environmental entities and processes) in our theories and policies. According to Arran Stibbe, ecolinguistics is an extension of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA henceforth) (Stibbe). CDA studies how language interrogates society and its role in how sociological processes such as racism, sexism, power relations, and cognitive linguistics are promoted or reduced. CDA is characteristically anthropocentric and explains how human relates to humans. The idea of Activation and passivation is an instance of the same attempt to study the role of communications in our environmental understanding. Van Leeuwen describes the two as follows:

Activation occurs when social actors are represented as an activity's active, dynamic forces. Passivation occurs when they are described as 'undergoing' the training or 'being at the receiving end of it'. [Activation] may be realized by ... transitivity structures in which activated social actors are coded as an actor in material processes, behavior in behavioral techniques, sayer in mental processes, sayer in verbal methods, or assigner in relational methods... [when activated] the social actor in question is most clearly foregrounded. (Stobbe 33)

In the poultry industry, chickens are interrogated with passivation or low Activation (Stibbe168). Chickens are committed to as a passive entity in their chronicles; for instance, chickens are 'shackled,' 'exposed to steam,' 'hung upside down, and so on. Shockingly, this linguistic pattern continues to exist in People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) (Stebbe168). It matters how we noun and verb the environmental entities and processes. Environmental communication and language give philosophy and other disciplines a chance to commit ethically. Words make commitments, but communication is made *with*. Note the difference between 'by' and 'within the previous sentence. When the communication is 'made with, we understand the ecolinguistics as relational.

### **Relational Ecolinguistics**

In *Language and Environment*, Edward Sapir shows the non-relational ecolinguistics in which the term 'environment' had not acquired its ecological meaning as stated by Haeckel (Sapir). The non-relational ecologism signifies merely the physical and social surroundings of humans. This shows that the confluence partakes in ecological and philosophical perspectives in establishing the contours of its concern and analysis. Relational ecolinguistics can have multiple ways of doing CDA. It is necessary to note that CDA is not free from criticism. CDAs have been argued to be naïve in assuming the particularity of a discourse analysis pertains to what people think. Knowingly and unknowingly, data manipulation has been primarily recorded in

CDA (Breeze 502).CDA being textual, commits not only to anthropocentrism but also to the ‘confirmation bias’ that human communications embody (Stebbe190).Lastly, CDA passivates its audience unintentionally. In the globalized world, exposure to multiple discourses seldom renders a particular CDA incomplete or unimpactful (Breeze508).

Ecolinguistics need not indulge in any existing patterns of CDA; in fact, many obstacles that ecological thinking overcomes are present in CDA. Just as meetings are essential to organize an event, discussions of disciplines and ecolinguistics and epistemology, science, and philosophy are necessary for any organized thought dealing with the ecology of domains and crisis of ecology. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson emphatically equates ecological crisis with the problem of epistemological errors. Bateson measures the core of epistemological error as follows:

Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of choosing the wrong unit: you end up with the species versus the other species around it or the environment in which it operates. (Bateson340)

The linguistic root of the ecological crisis shows that the map is not the territory that Bateson also argued to be a problem of environmental concern. Western philosophers and academic disciplines' model of communication assumes a model that supports the anthropocentric idea of objectivity and rationality (Bowers 2012). Ecological intelligence, which Bateson argues for,



pushes forward the proposal that knowing is part of a more crowded and complex information exchange. Thus, what we as mammals with neocortex deal with as ways of living, philosophies do not explore information and communication, and other academic disciplines involve a collective and dynamic view of information exchange. The next step in ecological thinking is to explore no mammalian and microscopic communications, information exchange, living, and dying. One of the many ways this marginalization or skewing of communication potential occurs is the heavy use of nouns in our languages. Bateson opines that:

...the genetic script probably contains nothing resembling the nouns or substantives of human language. I expect that when the almost unknown realm of processes whereby DNA determines embryology is studied, it will be found that DNA mentions nothing but relations. If we ask DNA how many fingers this human embryo will have, the answer might be, "Four paired relations between (fingers)." And if we ask how many gaps between fingers, the answer would be "three paired relations between (gaps)." Only the "relations between" are defined and determined in each case. The relata, the end components of the relationships in the human world, are perhaps never mentioned. (Bateson 157-158)

Relational ecolinguistics has to focus on linguistics and philosophy. Ecosophy refers to being conscious and active in two things – the way we know and naming what we know. In quoting

what we see, we not only reduce its relations and dynamic nature but also freeze the power of that particular way of learning. Relational ecolinguistics provides a better way of naming and knowing than non-relational ecolinguistics, which only follows one specific form of knowing and calling.

### **Speculative Fabulations**

The limitations of CDA, as indirectly shown by Bateson's proposal in the last section, will also be explored herein. In this section, various ways in which new language trends can be used to create a form of opening ecological insights. S. Veeramani, in *Relexification of English Towards Eco Linguistics*, argues that linguistics and, by that token communicational channels play a very significant role in ecological conditions. He proposes *green* language signifying how English use brings anthropocentric *grey* linguistics (Veeramani). In doing so, he offers an innovative framework to carefully work within the languages we already use.

Gabriella Vigliocco has argued that the ontological commitments made in linguistics within a mammalian framework are incomplete and non-ecological (Vigliocco). Her ecological approach pushes forward a multimodal approach to language learning and processing. She argues that language studies focus on Indo-European language due to the historical practice of studying spoken languages. She argues that Indo-European languages are capable of arbitrary form meaning, largely independent of context and wholly dependent on symbolic systems that are manipulable at abstract levels of representation.

The random property of Indo-European language acts as the standard of existing structures and categories to understand and theorize other mammalian and human languages. The non-arbitrary mappings of mimetic, idiophonic, and sound-symbolic linguistic properties are either subsumed in pre-existing classifications and structures or dismissed entirely. She claims that the primary reason for this methodology is the ignorance of face-to-face communication and embodied aspects of interaction, but the problem has many more theoretical dimensions. Face-to-face communications make language embodied, affective, and a converging point for multiple communicational channels that are non-characteristic of language studies' existing practice. A more embodied and multimodal study of language would include other mammalian languages from sub-Saharan Africa, Korean, and Balto-Finnic, to name a few (Vigliocco).

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway describes speculative tabulation as a “mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of wording” (Haraway 230). As illustrated in the previous section, the way we use language and communicational channels has an impact on not only our world of human-mammalian capacities but also on no mammals and the microscopic world of micro-entities and processes; speculative tabulations provide a way of normalizing scientific thinking with ecological intelligence. Haraway proposes and advises us to create multispecies storytelling for such normalizing trends and practice companionship with

entities that are not usually thought of by culture or science. She calls this normalizing method SF:

SF is a sign for science fiction, speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation, science fact, and string figures. Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads, and failing. Still, sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite flourishing on terra, on earth. (Haraway 10)

How we passivate and activate stories to relate with other species and forms of life has a vital role in what ecolinguistics can contribute. A two-step goal can be established to expand relational ecolinguistics within our current language use. Firstly, we must recognize the existing communicational channels and not reduce them into a distinct pattern of linguistics, as Vigliocco has argued. Secondly, our goal should be to promote ways of suspending the grammatical patterns of talking, relating, and committing to using language. The best way to achieve the second goal is to indulge in interdisciplinary studies, and the best way to achieve the first goal is to submit to non-disciplinary ways of thinking and to know.

SF is not something that is done by aware intellectuals but also an inherent and inevitable outcome of ontological commitments made by any system of knowledge production.

Consider how CDA argues for the Information Deficit Model (IDM henceforth). IDM contends that the lack of knowledge and information leads to inaction and disbelief in climate change and other ecological crises we are witnessing. Moser and Dilling reveal that models like IDM are insufficient as it commits human beings into a fantasy of “little scientists” who have no identification with values and beliefs apart from empirical certitude (Moser and Dilling164). The speculative fabulations of humans being "little scientists" can be expanded with relational ecolinguistics and counter-stories to reveal what more can be thought of to commit carefully and holistically. This may mean taking inter-disciplinary and even non-disciplinary ventures.

### Conclusion

Ecosophy and ecological intelligence provides intellectual and to think not just more-than-human and more-than-mammal stories of living and dying. The paper shows that CDA's ability to study the relationship between language and social processes marginalizes ecological awareness. To promote, activate, elevate, and celebrate more-than-human and more-than-mammalian stories of living and dying is to challenge scientific speculations and definitions of humans and other entities. Banu Subramaniam in *Ghost Stories for Darwin* shows how in an essential sense, we end up doing speculative fabulations when indulging in both interdisciplinary and non-disciplinary ways of thinking and knowing (Subramaniam). The following comments by Subramaniam will end the paper's intentions succinctly:

I believe we need not only science fiction but fictional sciences—imagining other configurations of knowledge making, reconstructing alternate inter-and a-disciplinary lenses, new conceptual practices, and more engaging plots and stories located in the interdisciplinary fissures of the sciences and the humanities. (Subramaniam 72)

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