

A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC PATTERNS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE WELL-BEING OF THE ECO-SYSTEM

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Abstract: The prominence of the word ecology cannot be limited to environmentalists and scientists alone. As the effects of environmental hazards have affected the common man, the word ecology has expanded its boundaries to all spheres of learning. The fate of human beings on the planet is directly proportional to the sustainability of their ecosystem. Language is a means through which humans interact with each other and communication is the epicentre that enables humans to understand each other and their environment. Language not only persuades humans to act, understand, behave or respond in a particular way but it also influences the thought process of an individual. The environmental crises have already set off alarm bells; for which if humans still turn a deaf ear, the havoc can engulf the very existence of human beings. The rapid decline of forest cover, animals, fishes and the depletion of fossil fuels are the result of nature being considered as a resource to be exploited by humans. This paper is a theoretical approach to environmental literacy and Ecosophy. It is an attempt to justify the link between language and the ecosphere.

Keywords: Ecology, Linguistics, Ecosophy, Wellbeing, Ecolinguistics, Economy, Environment, Language, Lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

“The earth has enough resources for our need, but not for our greed”, this quote by Mahatma Ghandi signifies the exploitation and degradation of environment in the name of progress and development. The forest cover of any country is primarily cleared for activities like construction of roads, dams, and hydroelectric plants, neglecting the aftereffects. Later these roads not only pave the way to tourists but also to hunters, poachers and other anti-social elements. “It is estimated that after independence, India has lost 4696 million hectares of forest land” (Singh & Mal 36). This data adding to the ecosophy of India is a mere sample of the condition that prevails throughout the world. Humans see earth as a ‘place for them to live’, ‘only for them to live’, ‘only for him/her to live’. This outlook of man can be well compared with the hawk in Ted Hughes outstanding poem *Hawk Roosting*.

The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth’s face upward for my inspection.

.....
I kill where I please because it is all mine, ...
(6-8, 14)

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Individualism is seen spreading among the younger generations, right from their schooldays in the form of competition, wellbeing and rational thinking. To program people with a change in their outlook towards nature and to make them aware of the ecological crises, the education system itself is to be rewarmed. “The increasing reliance on cell phones, text-messaging, and video games marginalize the importance of face-to-face interactions as well as awareness of the behaviors of natural systems—the sounds of birds, changes in flora and fauna that accompany changes in seasons.”, (Bowers 6). The present generations with complete focus only on their mobile phone’s screen, with online games as their food for existence and ears always rendered to the musical numbers through the deep ear reachable headphones seems totally cut off from the ecosystem. As a result a large chunk of the new breeds of graduates and technocrats are still not aware of the ecological crises that are largening with every passing day. Today, communication is too limited that people who text each other are hardly concerned about others. A language as a medium through which a person communicates is largely dependent on the natural habitat of the language users.

ECOLINGUISTICS

Ecolinguistics connects linguistics with ecology. The relationship between linguistics and biological diversity plays a vital role in defining the world to a layman. How the world is perceived and decoded depends on how it is encoded and presented. The language used in advertisements to promote a product, the choice of words being used and the linguistic pattern used can take the product much closer to the consumers. Today, terms like ‘bigger’ and ‘more’ are considered as positive and their opposites as negative. Its effect can be clearly felt in the world of marketing. To lure a customer who writes from his early schoolings learnt from his teacher to pronounce ‘big’ with a smile and expanded arms and word ‘small’ with an unhappy face; the products that are dumped into the market usually holds an attractive tag with the words ‘get more’, ‘now bigger size’ as in chocolates. This is a universal example that proves the power of words to create a world of its own for anyone who comprehends it. As such, words that are frequently used to refer to the world that we live in and the objects that we see around decide how we understand, consider and even accept our environment. The voice of the vulnerable goes unheard because the language used by them to cry out to the world sometimes conveys a different meaning to the world than intended.

Today, nature is considered as a commodity to be used by humans since it is being framed as such. Humans consider nature as an object and themselves as the owner of the object having the right to do whatever they please. “The pronoun ‘our’ in ‘our ecological resources’ maps the owner on to ‘humans’ showing ecological systems as belonging to humans rather than to all species who depend on them”, (Stibbe 53). The discourse that is primarily used in advertisements, study materials,

and even movies bridge the relationship that one develops with the natural world. “The dominant discourse in the medieval world was theology, in the modern world science, and now the discourse that defines reality for most people is economics”, (Stibbe 24). The primary objective of our society as such has been shifted completely from wellbeing to economic growth.

The ideology of consumption is redefined by economics based discourse. Consumers nowadays buy any product with an offer not knowing if the product is really needed by them; irrespective of being rich or poor, they are in a ‘rat race’ to consume more than what they need. The outlook that the advertising world has been creating through its language is, ‘buy something if you really want to be happy and to have an improved lifestyle’. The present generation needs to be made aware that when they consume more than what they need, they are either snatching away somebody else’s basic need or plundering nature’s treasures which are meant to be handed down to the generations to come.

PROMINENCE OF THE STUDY

Species extinction, ozone depletion, deforestation and pollution are a few prominent threats to life’s existence on planet earth. The rivers and streams where our forefathers played in clean and clear waters are no longer fit for the future generations. The number of people using non-degradable plastic bags and the number of factories that equally pollute air, water and soil are multiplying in a fast phase just in the name of growth, development and success. The new phase of success is being defined by linguistic patterns as not being good, happy, peaceful or humane but being economically sound. Every human being on the planet in some way is a whole heartedly committed participant in this race towards this so-called ‘ultimate success’.

“Benjamin Whorf in his hypothesis named as Sapir Whorf claimed that language determines how a culture looks at the world”, (Denham & Lobeck 346). He further stated that a culture provides a window into how the members of that culture think. We see, hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose us to create interpretations.

BONDING LANGUAGE WITH ECOLOGY

Sapir in 1912 expressing the relation between the language and culture on one hand and the physical and the social environment on the other, initiated the clubbing of ecology and linguistics. The term ecolinguistics was defined in 1972 by the Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen as “the study of interactions between any given languages and its environment”, (Behar et al. 186). The world around us is built up on the language being used. The language largely shapes the perspective of the world around. If ever the human race happens to meet aliens, communication would be highly impossible for this very reason.

Ecosophy is a term that describes ecological philosophy; the stories of everything that is happening to man environment, and its outcome. Discourses can encourage people either to protect or destroy the environment, “abstract terms like ‘mammal’, ‘reptile’, ‘fauna’, ‘organism’ are sometimes used in new nature writing since it is a multi-voiced genre that frequently mixes scientific and personal observation”, (Stibbe 177). The animals being referred in the present day writings are usually represented as total beings and not as individual organisms. In a cattle farm the cows and calves are addressed as livestock rather than individuals with intrinsic worth. Starting from chickens being raised intensively for meat and now bulls and oxen are being raised exclusively for meat. The millennial who are born raised, and live in a city never catch a glimpse of a hen (chicken) in its own habitat, scratching the ground looking for insects, worms and seeds, and protecting its chicks. Their concept of chicken is what the advertising world so generously provides. Their options for chicken are just limited to grilled chicken, boneless, barbecued, smoked, fried, fricasseed and so the list goes on. When the media in its weather report says, Normal life disturbed due to rain (or snow) it sends a message that nature is disturbing the normal life of a normal man. In turn when some harm is done to nature by man, it is being reported as a sign of progress and development by the media.

The language that is being used in movie conversations has undergone a change that is not only drastic but also dramatic. The lyrics of the songs that are framed today are far different from the lyrics that were composed decades back. Objects from nature were then drawn in as metaphor and simile to magnify and beautify relationships and express feelings. These examples of nature are now replaced with violent expressions and verses to express a tender feeling or emotion. The dialogue in a Tamil movie, uttered by a hero says, “*Naamavazhanumna, yara vena yethanaperu vena kolalam*”, which translates as, “If we want to live, any person and any number of persons we want maybe killed”. Dialogues of similar vein can be frequently heard today in teleserials and movies uttered by people who play the lead roles. The language being used thus sends signals to the observers that to live a life of one’s choice, one can loot, plunder or destroy man or nature. As a result it paves way to more crimes like illegal mining of nature’s wealth such as sand, rock and many, many more.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Understanding the fact that language has a role in addressing ecological issues and also the power to influence our thought process is a necessity of this age. If the learned community in schools and colleges, and also curriculum designers flavour the lessons taught to the younger generations with the essence of nature conservation and eco-friendliness, the huge threat that awaits to engulf the existence of human life on earth can be easily neutralised.

2. Language learning textbooks and workbooks that are meant for engineering students and technocrats should not be cluttered only with engineering terms and compound words that represent mechanisms; it should also include expressions and words that highlight the tender and brighter side of 'Mother Nature'.
3. "Economic growth hides the poverty it creates through the destruction of nature", (Stibbe 91). The ideology that economic growth is the sole key to happiness and wellbeing of a society is to be rewritten. Children need to be enlightened through language, stories and activities of the brighter side of life and happiness acquired by being one with the ecosystem.
4. Growth with technology, but not at the cost of unbalancing the ecosystem needs to be made the new definition of growth.
5. The existing censor board should be reframed and its duties and responsibilities extended to monitor the language of the media and the advertisements to make it free from indirect, anti-eco slogans and writings.
6. Creators of artforms such as writers, movie makers and musicians need to assess the quality of their work in terms of eco-conservation.
7. Educational institutions of all kinds around the world should foster ecological intelligence by including practical lessons on farming, cultivation and rearing of hens and other domestic animals (if not as farming, at least to address individual needs).
8. Huge machines and saws used for cutting rocks, digging, lifting soil and cutting down trees should not be made easily accessible to the common man unless and until it is very much needed.

CONCLUSION

A change in the thinking and outlook of individuals indisputably brings about great positive changes in the society. Looking outside for a saviour to save the earth and waiting for any organisation to campaign and plant more trees is pointless; especially when it's already too late to introspect. The physical, mental health and well being that an individual acquires from getting connected to nature is to be felt and shared. The role of linguistics and linguistic patterns in balancing the ecosystem gains prominence since language is not the only factor through which one communicates; in addition it also presents the world to humans. This 'upper hand' that language nourishes if directed towards the well being of ecosystem will no doubt nurture nature.

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