Ecolinguistics for ethical leadership

Arran Stibbe, University of Gloucestershire

Introduction

For all the destruction it has caused, the coronavirus pandemic has also shone a spotlight on the nature of industrialised civilisation, provoked reflection on its flaws, and kindled a determination to rebuild a different kind of civilisation in its wake. This can be seen in the simple alliterative slogan 'Build Back Better' promoted by the US White House, but also in more searching comments in the media and social media. Dave Hollis (2020) invites us into reflection: 'In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to'. Sonya Renee Taylor (2020) describes some aspects of 'normal' that we certainly would not want to return to:

> We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack … We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

The stitching metaphor is a powerful call to reconstruct a socially just society and protect the ecosystems that life depends on. The journalist Peter Baker (2020) also uses a textile metaphor in conjunction with a light metaphor to inspire renewal: 'disasters and emergencies do not just throw light on the world as it is. They also rip open the fabric of normality. Through the hole that opens up, we glimpse possibilities of other worlds'. Arundhati Roy (2020) uses a parallel metaphor where the hole in the fabric becomes a portal: 'historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next'.

Breaking away from the horrors of what was 'normal', imagining the world anew, and stitching a garment that fits all of humanity and nature will require *ethical leadership* to build a new, more ethical and sustainable society. It will require ethical leadership not just from CEOs, politicians and people who have official leadership roles in organisations, but from everyone who has the opportunity and ability to influence how other people see the world.

The practice of leadership is conducted primarily through words. As Drew Westen (2011) points out, 'The stories our leaders tell us matter, probably almost as much as the stories our parents tell us as children, because they orient us to what is, what could be, and what should be'. Similarity, Geoff Mead (2014, p. 3) writes that 'Successful leadership depends on the stories we tell and the stories we live and how well they speak to the need of our time'. This makes ethical leadership of great concern to ecolinguistics, since one of the key roles of ecolinguistics is to reveal the stories we live by, challenge them and contribute to the search for new stories to live by. This chapter explores what ecolinguistics can contribute to both the theory of ethical leadership and practical leadership training, and what theories of ethical leadership can contribute to ecolinguistics.

Ecolinguistics

In the past, the term *ecolinguistics* was applied to a diverse range of areas of study, but has become increasingly aligned with other ecological humanities subjects in its focus on engaged inquiry that takes into consideration not only humans but other species and the ecosystems that life depends on. Sibo Chen (2016, p. 109) performed a critical analysis of 76 journal articles on ecolinguistics and came to the conclusion that:

> Ecolinguistics seeks to explore linguistic phenomena found in inter-language, inter-human, and human-nature relationships from the perspective of ecological philosophy. In contrast to other subfields of linguistics, ecolinguistics adopts "ecosophy" as its principle normative framework.

Other areas of linguistics such as Critical Discourse Analysis explore issues including racism, sexism and homophobia from a normative framework, which is usually orientated towards opposing oppression and creating a fairer and more equitable society. There is, however, little point in building an equal society if its consumption patterns destroy the ecosystems that life depends on because it would be unsustainable and could not continue into the future. An ecosophy, by definition, is a normative framework that takes into consideration not only humans but other species and the physical environment. What makes a form of linguistics *ecolinguistic*s is not a particular methodology or approach but a more general care that extends beyond an individual human, beyond a group of humans, to encompass all humans as well as future generations, other species and the wider ecosystems that life depends on, and an orientation towards practical action to make a difference. Ecolinguistic studies have examined issues such as the representation of animals in industrial farming; the obsession with profit and economic growth; discourses of consumerism; the language of environmentalism; indigenous and traditional discourses of nature; nature writing; the relationship between language diversity and biodiversity and a wide range of other areas, using a wide range of linguistic techniques, but all grounded in an explicit or implicit ecosophy.

It is not just the end-goal that distinguishes ecolinguistics from other forms of linguistic enquiry. An ecological perspective influences *what* ecolinguists see as language and *where* they see language as located. While prevailing structuralist and poststructuralist views of language see it as a fixed system existing within the minds of native speakers, ecolinguists have increasingly been seeing language as existing within the interactions of humans with other humans, other species and the physical environment, i.e., within ecology (Cowley 2018, p. 47). To illustrate this by analogy: messaging between trees along mitochondrial networks can be occasioned by the external environment (e.g., an attack by pests) and can lead to physical changes (surrounding trees raising their defences), which has consequences for the future survival of the trees. The messaging itself is part of the life-sustaining interaction of organisms with other organisms and the physical environment so is part of ecology. In the same way, messaging among humans is influenced by the mental, social, biological and physical environment, and can influence behaviour, which in turn has consequences for the ecosystems that life depends on.

The term ‘languaging’ is used in ecolinguistics for this ecologically embedded linguistic interaction (Steffensen 2009, Cowley 2014, 2018, Steffensen and Fill 2014, Steffensen and Cowley 2021). Steffensen (2011, p. 203) writes that ‘when languaging, human beings create a meshwork of bio-socio-ecological relations’. Protassova (2012, p. 214) describes how ‘all linguistic activity is languaging. As the manner of operating in a consensual domain, it serves to coordinate human behaviour in everyday life. It represents the integrated action of thinking, making sense, verbal structuring, and adapting to the world of experiences’. The term ‘languaging’ is a deliberate use of a verb for something which is usually referred to as a noun, ‘language’, in order to draw attention to how it exists only within interaction, rather than existing separately in the minds of speakers or as a reified ‘thing’ such as ‘English’ or ‘Chinese’.

Clearly, the coordination of human behaviour is central to leadership and the concept of languaging helps capture the processes of leadership as it happens in the world. Since languaging influences and is part of the ecological systems that life depends on, languaging is of central concern not just for leadership, but ethical leadership.

Ecosophy

What unites ecolinguistics and ethical leadership is the concept of ‘ecosophy’. The term originated with Félix Guattari (see Guattari 2014) and Arne Næss (see Naess 1995). While Guattari’s conception of ecosophy as a link between minds, social structures and the environment is highly relevant to ecolinguistics and languaging, it tends to be Næss’s (1995, p. 8) more practical definition that is used by ecolinguistics:

> By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony … openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs … The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only ‘facts’ of pollution, resources, population, etc., but also value priorities.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, an ecosophy is what guides the practice of ecolinguists. While ecolinguists are more or less explicit about their ecosophy in their writing, all are using a philosophical framework that considers humans, other species and the physical environment when they are making judgements about linguistic issues. The concept of ecosophy is equally applicable to ethical leaders, who use their ecosophy to critically analyse the stories that shape their institution and society and use language in ways that align with their ecosophy in the search for new stories to live by.

The following is an example of an explicit ecosophy, a shortened version of Stibbe (2021a, p. 14), which is also the ecosophy that is informing this chapter:

> Ecosophy in one word**:** *Living!*

Explanation

- **Valuing living:** The exclamation mark in *Living!* is normative, indicating 'to be valued / celebrated / respected / affirmed', and it applies to all species that are living.
- **Now and the future:** *Living!* includes the ability to live with high wellbeing in the present, the near future, and for future generations.
- **Environmental limits:** *Living!* into the future requires massive overall reduction of consumption and transformation of practices in all sectors to keep within environmental limits.
- **Social justice:** All must have the means to live with high wellbeing even as total consumption is reduced. This necessitates redistribution of resources from over-consumers to under-consumers.
- **Deep adaptation:** Environmental changes that make the Earth less hospitable for life are already locked in, and ways to allow *Living!* as far as possible in the declining conditions of the world must be found.

An ecosophy is a complex ethical framework in the mind of an analyst or leader that changes over time as they are exposed to ideas and experience, and so can only be partially captured in a snapshot like this.

Ecosophy relies on reflection. Cohen and Qualters (2007, p. 110) call for 'leadership that values reflective ethical inquiry as an ongoing practice for empowering ethical awareness, investigation and responding'. Despite the inability to fix an ecosophy in time, making an ecosophy explicit demonstrates the criteria that ecolinguists and ethical leaders are using when making ethical judgements about communication practices. There cannot, of course, be a 'neutral' position beyond an ecosophy when dealing with issues of the injustice and the ability of the earth to support life. As Desmond Tutu once said:

> If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality (Tutu in Brown 1984, p. 19).

Treating racist discourse or discourse which promotes harm to the natural world neutrally, by pointing out interesting linguistic features without any kind of explicit or implied judgement would be a highly political act in itself: complicity in current unequal and environmentally destructive social arrangements. For both ecolinguists and ethical leaders, aligning their action with their ecosophy is a way to display integrity. According to Liu (2017, p. 265), 'Integrity refers to the extent to which leaders act consistently in line with their core values and is strongly associated with leadership authenticity'.

Of course, ethical leaders often work not individually, but as part of a wider team. There is a balance between the leader imposing their own ecosophy and demanding others work towards it, with conversation to discover shared values that everyone is motivated to work towards together. The problem is that in industrial societies the prevailing values often disregard the interest of other species and the ecosystems that support life, so there is a danger that a shared ecosophy will be weakened down to the lowest denominator. Cels

(2017, p. 762) represents an approach which is both top-down in imposing an ecosophy but also dialogic:

> Ethical leaders…articulate the values and norms that others should be concerned about and orchestrate a conversation about these norms and values with and between the people whose efforts are vital to achieving moral and practical objectives.

A potential way forward is for leaders to work with the team to advance a subset of their own personal ecosophy that is shared by the whole team, while gently encouraging the team to move in the direction of a stronger joint ecosophy. An example would be if the leader has an ecosophy of 'no exploitation of animals for products' while the team has a weaker ecosophy, then they could start working together on an ecosophy of 'reducing the exploitation of animals for products' that would be compatible for all. This could eventually be strengthened as the team's ecosophy evolves. In general, any team will be made up of individuals who have their own ecosophy, and leaders (whether appointed or impromptu leaders) can work with elements that are shared across the team while also trying to influence the team to take on a stronger ecosophy (i.e., one with more care for other people, other species and the ecosystems that life depends on). The result is a community of practice with inclusive, engaged participation, but where ethical values are not compromised by the lowest common denominator.

The search for new stories to live by

This chapter uses an approach to ecolinguistics first described in Stibbe (2015) and developed further in Stibbe (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b). The approach can be summarised as conducting linguistic analysis of texts that are prevalent in a culture to reveal the 'stories we live by', judging those stories using an ecosophy, resisting stories that oppose that ecosophy, and searching for 'new stories to live by' that resonate and promote the ecosophy. The term 'stories' here refers to cognitive structures in the minds of individuals which influence how they think, talk and act. The 'stories we live by' are stories that are spread widely across a particular culture in a process that van Dijk (2009, p. 19) calls 'social cognition'.

To give an example: If an analyst had an ecosophy which saw animals as beings with intrinsic value then they would analyse prevailing cultural texts, reveal the ways that they represent animals and judge them as destructive if they represent animals as resources who are worthless in their own right (Stibbe 2012). Of most interest are not individual texts but larger patterns that run across numerous texts, e.g., the discourse of the animal product industries (Glenn 2004, Arcari 2017). Where these larger patters are common within the analyst's culture they can consider them 'stories we live by', and the task is to move away from destructive stories and search for 'new stories to live by'. In this case, the analyst may search cultures around the world for inspirational forms of language which convey messages that align with their ecosophy, i.e., messages that confirm the intrinsic value of animals.

Ethical Leadership

This previous section described an ecolinguist as an engaged inquirer who actively seeks to change the society and culture they are part of, based on linguistic theory and an ethical framework that includes consideration of other people, other species and the physical environment. This activity has certain parallels to ethical leadership: the ethical base for action, the critique of current social arrangements, and the intention to influence and change the worldview and actions of others. Two questions arise. Firstly, can the practice of ecolinguistics be considered as a form of ethical leadership in its own right? If so, can a form of ecolinguistics be usefully applied not only by academic linguists but by leaders of all kinds, from those leading their company and community to those leading their society? The answers to these questions depend, of course, on how 'ethical leadership' is defined and characterised. This section examines some concepts of ethical leadership from the business literature that could potentially be rethought along ecolinguistic lines to serve wider interests than the predominant goals of organisational business.

The most frequently cited theory of ethical leadership is Brown *et al.* (2005, p. 120) which characterises ethical leadership as follows:

> Ethical leaders are models of ethical conduct who become the targets of identification and emulation for followers. For leaders to be perceived as ethical leaders and to influence ethics-related outcomes, they must be perceived as attractive, credible, and legitimate. They do this by engaging in behaviour that is seen as normatively appropriate (e.g., openness and honesty) and motivated by altruism (e.g., treating employees fairly and considerately). Ethical leaders must also gain followers' attention to the ethics message by engaging in explicit ethics-related communication and by using reinforcement to support the ethics message.

The emphasis on communication that reinforces ethical messages aligns with ecolinguistics since a central task of ecolinguistics consists of finding forms of language which promote a particular ethical framework (ecosophy). Brown *et al.* call for 'explicit' ethics-related communication but conveying ethical values does not need to be done explicitly in terms of stating what is right, wrong, moral or immoral. Ecolinguistics shows how texts convey ethical values more subtly, between the lines, often being more effective for being implicit (Stibbe 2021a).

A problematic aspect of Brown *et al*'s characterisation of ethical leadership is the passive nature of the ethical framework, which rests only on what is 'seen as normatively appropriate' by society. In industrial societies, there are many things that may be seen as 'normatively appropriate' that are causing suffering and harm to current and future generations such as factory farming, exploitation of workers in developing countries, or the single-minded pursuit of profit and economic growth. The ecosophy of an ecolinguist or ethical leader will go far further than the prevailing norms of an unequal and unsustainable industrial society. This passivity has been questioned by Kaptein (2019, p. 1136) who argues that ethical leadership does not just follow ethics but also leads it:

> Contrary to Brown et al.'s (2005) suggestion, an ethical leader is not only a moral person and a moral manager who demonstrates normatively appropriate behaviour and follows the current ethical norms. An ethical leader is also a moral entrepreneur who creates new ethical norms…[and] contributes to the development of both society and the trust of stakeholders.

The term 'moral entrepreneur' was originally coined by Howard Becker to refer negatively to self-righteous moral crusaders as well as more positively to those who have a genuine altruistic and humanitarian ethical framework and take action to change the prevailing ethics of the society they live within in line with that framework. Becker (1995, p. 169) gives the example that 'Abolitionists were not simply trying to prevent slave owners from doing the wrong thing, they were trying to help slaves to achieve a better life'. A more modern example is the international campaign to ban landmines, which Faulkner (2007) describes as successful due to moral entrepreneurs. In their attempt to challenge prevailing cultural stories about what is good, bad, moral, immoral, ethical and unethical on the basis of a deeply held ecosophy, ecolinguists and ethical leaders could be considered moral entrepreneurs in this sense.

While Brown *et al.*'s vision was of influencing direct followers to change their behaviour, the issues that ecolinguistics faces are global issues of vast cultural and spatial extent and require widespread social change. As Visser and Courtice (2011, p. 28) point out: 'sustainability leadership…is geared towards bringing about profound change, whether in our political and economic systems, our business models and practices, or in the broad social contract with stakeholders and society'. Visser and Courtice use the term 'sustainability leadership' rather than 'ethical leadership', although what they mean is very much the same thing: 'A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world' (Visser and Courtice 2011, p. 27).

The term 'sustainability leadership' has the disadvantage of being associated with the dominant sustainable development discourse, as used by the United Nations, which has been accused of being anthropocentric and failing to challenge prevailing ideologies of economic growth (Hickel 2017). The term 'ethical leader' is more general, which has the positive aspect of potentially including anyone who has an influence on others. It is vital, of course, that consideration of other species and the ecosystems that life depends on is wrapped up into the definition of 'ethical'. An ethical system which considered only the human would, after all, be incomplete since any desired state for humanity depends entirely on the ability of the planet to support life into the future.

Visser and Courtice's (2011, p. 29) model of sustainability leadership consists of three aspects. Firstly, the context of leadership which includes the ecological, political, economic and organisational context. Secondly, the traits of an individual leader, which include caring, morally-driven, holistic thinker, altruistic etc. Thirdly, leadership actions, which include informed decisions, performance accountability, and stakeholder transparency. It therefore combines trait-based leadership (Zaccaro 2007) with situational theories of leadership (Blanchard *et al.* 1993). From an ecolinguistic perspective, the extension of context beyond the immediate institutional situation to take account of the social and ecological context is

important. However, what is missing is a sense of the leader intervening in the social structures around them to create change. Visser and Courtice's model is static and does not address the moment-by-moment discursive struggle to define and re-define reality that leaders necessarily play a role in through their language. As Heizmann and Liu (2018, p. 41) point out:

> Much of this strand of the sustainability leadership literature resonates with competency-based approaches to leadership development and is focused on distilling surface-level and generalised behavioural patterns that effective sustainability leaders ought to develop. In doing so, sustainability leadership is not only divorced from the context of the diverse meaning-making frameworks in which it is embedded …but it is also too often constructed through the logic of an anthropocentric worldview

That's not to say that competency-based approaches are entirely irrelevant to ecolinguistics since it would be possible to define competencies in critical language awareness of the stories that industrial civilisation is based on, ethical reflection, and the ability to use language in innovate ways that can contribute to new stories to live by. However, a more dynamic approach is necessary to capture the world-building aspects of languaging.

One of the most useful dynamic characterisations of leadership is that of Smircich and Morgan (1982, p. 258):

> Leadership is realised in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others…They emerge as leaders because of their role in framing experience in a way that provides a viable basis for action, e.g., by mobilising meaning, articulating and defining what has previously remained implicit or unsaid, by inventing images and meanings that provide a focus for new attention, and by consolidating, confronting, or changing prevailing wisdom.

The process described by Smircich and Morgan parallels ecolinguistics by linking languaging (in their words *framing, defining, articulating,* and *mobilising meaning*), with revealing the stories we live by (which they describe as *prevailing wisdom* that has *previously remained implicit*), *confronting* and *changing* those stories, and acting in ways which provide new stories to live by (*a focus for new attention*). Drath and Palus (1994, p. 4) present a similar view of leadership as primarily based in meaning and influencing underlying stories about the world (which they call 'world versions'):

> Meaning can be thought of as a cognitive and emotional framework (an internal structure of ideas and feelings) that allows a person to know (in the sense of understand) some world version (a representation of the way things are and the way they ought to be) and that places the person in relation to this world version. Given this way of thinking about meaning, meaning-making then consists of the creation, nurturance, and evolution (or revolution) of these cognitive and emotional frameworks. When the making of such frameworks happens in a community of practice…then we can say that leadership is happening.

Within these models, leadership is an active process, something which emerges within interaction as individuals inspire others to rethink the world around them. This approach to leadership parallels the more dynamic approach to language in ecolinguistics.

The move from 'language' to 'languaging' could be mirrored in a move from 'a leader' to 'leadering'. The term 'leadering' emphasises that the phenomenon of being a leader exists in real time in real interaction rather than being a fixed property of a person – 'leadership is happening' as Drath and Palus put it above, rather than 'someone is a leader'. While 'leadering' is a useful term for the discussion here, the term 'way-making' may be more suitable to capture the both the active process of leadering and the way it opens up new paths to the future through discovering new stories to live by. As Heizmann and Liu (2018, p. 41) point out, 'an emerging body of critical leadership studies is highlighting the need to conceive of leadership in more relational, practice-based and dialogic terms'. The dialogic is, of course, central to an ecolinguistic approach. However, while both Drath and Palua and Smircich and Morgan's models are dynamic and rooted in languaging, they lack an ethical dimension.

One theory of leadership that is particular up-front about ethics is *Transformative Leadership*. This theory is usually articulated for educational settings but could be applied more broadly. Carolyn Shields describes how the 'notions of promise, liberation, hope, empowerment, activism, risk, social justice, courage, or revolution' are at the heart of transformative leadership (Shields 2010, p. 559). For Shields (2010, p. 562), transformative leadership consists of 'a combination of both critique and promise; attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes; deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; acknowledgment of power and privilege'. The emphasis on 'the socially constructed nature of society' (Shields 2010, p. 571) and the approach of deconstructing knowledge frameworks and reconstructing new ones, parallels ecolinguistics and its aim to reveal the stories we live by and search for new stories to live by. Like most critical theory, however, the ethical focus is primarily on power inequality between human groups, rather than a wider consideration of how power influences the ecosystems that life depends on. It is possible to take the deconstructive and reconstructive focus of Transformational Leadership, expand it beyond the educational realm and beyond the human-only-world, to create the kind of engaged and active leadership that could address the social structures at the heart of an unsustainable society.

So far, this chapter has been building up a picture of ethical leaders as critically engaged with the texts, discourse and stories that their selves, organisations and societies are built on, questioning them according to their own personal ecosophy and conveying new stories to live by. There is one problem with this though, in that it represents the leader as acting individually rather than within an institutional context. It sees the ethical leader as a solo hero. Heizmann and Liu (2018, p. 41) point out that an overemphasis on individual agency can 'obscure the ways in which individuals are constituted as subjects through organisational and institutional discourses, which legitimise certain truth claims and organisational practices of sustainability leadership'. These broader discourses can constrain

leaders to serve the interests of a narrow set of stakeholders rather than the broader community of life. Heizmann and Liu (2018, p. 54) therefore describe how:

> On an individual level, leadership-as-practice development involves building learners' critical, self-reflexive capacities to challenge underlying beliefs that shape, and often constrain, their situated contexts (e.g., the primacy of business rationalities, individualist notions of leadership).

In terms of languaging, this involves awareness of the institutional constraints to inspirational forms of language that can build new stories to live by. Giddens (1991) model of *structuration* is useful here, as all leaders will have some agency to use language creatively in ways that accord with their ecosophy, while having institutional constraints which can punish them for stepping out of line or force them out of the organisation completely if they go too far. The ideal compromise is perhaps Deborah Meyerson's (2001) model of the 'tempered radical' – a leader who uses their agency to push the boundaries of acceptable discourse but not so far that they find themselves forced out of their position and lose the power to contribute to change entirely. By extending boundaries and visibly getting away with it, leaders can move those boundaries permanently, opening up new paths for others in the process.

Communicative Modes

The discussion so far in this chapter has focused on languaging as a way of shifting the stories we live by, but there are other communicative modes beyond language which play an important role in constructing social reality. Liu (2017, p. 263) writes that

> while ethical leadership in mainstream theorising is assumed to be a cognitive exercise, leaders' bodies in fact play a significant role in the social construction of ethical leadership. Their bodies (both their exposure and concealment) become particularly potent when leaders are depicted via the interplay between visual and verbal modes in the media.

If ethical leadership is a performance, then the bodies of the performer also play a role: gendered bodies, old or young bodies, muscular bodies, bodies clothed in particular ways, bodies close or distant, bodies displaying jewellery, and bodies performing particular gestures and postures. Gardner writes that:

> The ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on the particular story that he or she relates or embodies, and the reception to that story on the part of audiences (in Mead 2014, p. 2)

Liu (2017, p. 273) makes the interesting point that:

> As disembodied patriarchs, close-up and low-angle photographs of the CEOs cropped at the head and shoulders inspired a sense of awe and power. Their bodies were cloaked in dark business suits that blended seamlessly into dark backgrounds and accentuated their image as disembodied 'heads'.

Liu also describes how representations of female leaders, non-white leaders, or both, frequently emphasise their full bodies rather than just their heads. The non-display of the body is, therefore, meaningful in itself, and can reinforce binaries of leadership as rationalist control rather than an embodied belonging in the world.

The more general point here is that it would be artificial to separate embodied communication from words, or words from the diagrams, charts, images and photographs which accompany them in print or PowerPoint presentations. Ecolinguistics must necessarily go beyond language to achieve its goals, and ethical leadership will need embodied awareness and awareness of visual and other semiotic modes in addition to language.

An ecolinguistic approach to ethical leadership

Essentialist theories of ethical leadership see an 'ethical leader' as a particular kind of person – someone distinct from others through traits such as 'integrity and trustworthiness…high power inhibition, high moral reasoning levels, internal locus of control, low Machiavellianism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and social responsibility' (Liu 2017, p. 256). This neo-Aristotelian focus on virtues (Meyer *et al.* 2019) has the danger of limiting ethical leaders to a small group of exceptional individuals and creating unrealistic expectations (Cullen 2020, p. 1). There was shock and surprise, for instance, when Aung San Suu Kyi started acting in ways which did not align with the 'ethical leader' identity that had been imposed on her (Beech 2017). And if all there was to ethical leadership was an essentialist identity then linguistics would have little relevance.

Much more relevant for ecolinguistics are postmodern theories which see identity as 'fluid, fragmentary, contingent, and, crucially, constituted in discourse' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 17). Discursive theories see identity as existing only in the outer levels of performance within a discursively constrained context rather than the inner levels of being a particular kind of person. As Cullen (2020, p. 1) describes, 'leadership is "done" by imperfect human beings who try to avoid violating their own ethical standards while at the same time navigating the realities of social and organizational life'. The advantage of seeing leadership that is something that is 'done' or 'performed' is that it can be done by anyone, in any situation, not just an elite group of virtuous people or a set of people who have been allotted to particular leadership roles by society. As Mead (2014, p. 41) puts it 'leadership is a universal facet of human interaction in which we all participate from time to time'. He calls for 'Narrative Leadership', which he defines as 'the conscious use of stories and storytelling to make meaning with and for other people' (p. 94).

By 'story', Mead primarily means narrative, but it could equally be 'story' in the more general ecolinguistic sense of a cognitive structure which influences how individuals or cultural groups think, talk and act. And 'storytelling' could equally be the use of linguistic features that convey these cognitive structures. Ecolinguistics can provide a wealth of understanding of how linguistic features convey underlying stories which leaders can use to shape their own communicative patters and convey stories that align with their ecosophy.

This chapter is converging on a characterisation ethical leadership built from a combination of ecolinguistic theory and ethical leadership theory. Ethical leadership can be considered a performance, through language and other symbiotic modes, where an individual attempts to resist the destructive stories that a group of people live by and reshape the reality of the group through providing new beneficial stories to live by. It is a real-time process of 'leadering' (performing the identity of a leader) through 'languaging' (interaction through words and other modes), where what is considered 'beneficial' or 'destructive' is relative to the individual's ecosophy.

An Example

Alexander (2009, p. 113) gives an example of this form of leadership in his analysis of a lecture given by the Indian scholar and environmental activist Vandana Shiva. He notes how 'Shiva critically delineates how the myths associated with neo-liberal projects and "solutions" are being formulated' and resists these myths (or stories) through showing the harm that they cause. In the next step, Shiva provides 'counter-concepts, alternative metaphors and a different view of the world' (p.114), or, in ecolinguistics terms, new stories to live by. An example that Alexander gives is as follows:

> Shiva re-invigorates … devalued notions like smallness. 'Small farmers' is a positively loaded, affirmative term as used by Shiva. Shiva rewrites and re-iterates a counter-current to structural metaphorical thought, namely: SMALL IS GOOD (and by implication LARGE IS BAD). (p. 124)

In this way, Shiva is using language activity in ways that convey a new story about the world, one where, unlike dominant stories, smallness is valued.

Vandana Shiva's explicit calling into question of the stories that underlie industrial civilisation is evident in a more recent interview with the BBC. In the interview, Shiva (2021) states:

> Colonialism and industrialism have destroyed the Earth and indigenous cultures through four false assumptions. First, that we are separate from nature and not a part of nature. Second, that nature is dead matter, mere raw material for industrial exploitation. Third, that indigenous cultures are inferior and primitive, and need to be "civilised" through civilising missions of permanent colonization. Fourth, that nature and cultures need improvement through manipulation and external inputs.

Here she uses the term 'assumption' in a similar way to the 'story' of ecolinguistics, and at other times she uses the term 'myth'. Shiva makes the new stories to live by (which are, in fact, ancient ones) explicit in the following statement:

> I evolved the concept of Earth Democracy on the basis of my philosophy and practice that we are part of the Earth, and human freedom and human wellbeing depends on other species. We are not superior to other species, we are inter-beings. Anthropocentrism is a violent construct. Earth Democracy allows us to shift from

> economies and cultures that kill and democracies that are dead to living economies, living democracies, living cultures of the Earth, sharing her abundance, respecting her limits (Shiva 2021)

In this statement Shiva explicitly describes her ecosophy, and the new stories that she considers beneficial, including stories of environmental limits, sharing, democracy and culture rooted in the earth. In addition to this, throughout her interview, Shiva uses language features which convey these stories, for example:

> Yesterday, women from my region in the Himalayas gathered at Navdanya for a millet festival. The Green Revolution [that revolutionised India's farm production in the 1960s-70s] named them "backward" and "primitive" grains. But they [yield] 10 times more nutrition using 10 times less water. Members of Navdanya were calling me during lockdown to say that the Gardens of Hope we started provided food for their families and communities in spite of lockdown. Food and culture are the currency of life. And while we are overwhelmed by disease and death, a living food culture can show the light to the path of life. For me, food sovereignty is sovereignty over your life, livelihood and health. We are interconnected, therefore food sovereignty is an ecological process of co-creation with other lifeforms. (Shiva 2021)

In this extract, Shiva denounces the way that the technocratic Green Revolution frames traditional agriculture as “backward” and “primitive”. She resists the framing by pointing out how efficient traditional agriculture is. Shiva then applies an alternative framing of ‘life’ to traditional food culture, in the metaphors *food is the currency of life* and *a path to life,* and in the phrase *a living food culture*. This gives enormous positivity to traditional food practices by representing them as literally vital. Shiva also performs an *ecocultural identity* (Stibbe 2020) through the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ in ‘we are interconnected’, which includes both humans and ‘other lifeforms’, and by placing both humans and other lifeforms as the agent of a process of ‘co-creation’. In this way, Shiva challenges dominant stories and uses linguistic features in ways that convey stories of sharing and interconnection that resonate with her ecosophy.

This example, then, is a moment of leadering through languaging, where Vandana Shiva uses language in ways which could potentially shift the audience’s views of reality. The audience in this case is distributed spatially and temporally – they receive the words when they listen to interview. Whether or not it is an *effective* performance of ethical leadership depends on the impact it has on readers. And whether it can be considered a *beneficial* performance of ethical leadership depends on whether the stories that are being conveyed align with the ecosophy of the analyst. According to the ecosophy described above (*Living!*), this is a form of beneficial ethical leadership because it values all humans and all species and works towards their continued living into the future through sustainable food production.

Conclusion

The apparatus of ecolinguistics, including the ongoing development of an ecosophy to judge stories against, active critical analysis of the texts which shape society to reveal the stories we live by, and promotion of new stories to live by, are tools that can be used to perform ethical leadership. This could be in one-to-many situations such as the example discussed above of Vandana Shiva, or in more intimate communication one-to-one or within a group of people who are working together. Ethical leadership could be performed by someone who has an official leadership role, or by the most junior member of a team who calls out damaging stories and the linguistic features which convey them and inspires others to rethink reality along the lines of new stories to live by. Everyone, whatever level they are in society, is constrained in their expression by the structures of that society, so a key aspect of ethical leadership is understanding those constraints and pushing boundaries (gently) to contribute to a discursive shift that weakens the constraints and opens up paths to new forms of expression.

Ecolinguists themselves may not perceive themselves as performing ethical leadership through their professional practice. However, ecolinguistics research and outreach activities have been shown to have an impact on how others perceive the world around them and act in their personal and professional lives (Roccia 2020, Roccia and Iubini-Hampton 2021). Ecolinguists can have an impact on their students, on the teachers they lead professional development sessions for, on the executives of corporations that they run workshops for, on NGOs they work with in creating campaigns, on the local communities that they cooperate with, and publishers, counsellors, tourist guides, poets, creative writers and others who come across their work indirectly (Roccia 2020, Stibbe 2021c). If ecolinguists see themselves as performing ethical leadership through their work and draw from theories of ethical leadership, languaging and leadering to inform their practice, then the discipline of ecolinguistics could become even more engaged and make an even greater difference to the world.

For ecolinguistics to play a role in the development of ethical leadership it is necessary to conduct future research which investigates leadership performance of all kinds to a) gain a deeper understanding of the detailed linguistic techniques that individuals use to shape the reality of others in line with their ecosophy; b) gain a deeper understanding of how the ecosophy of an individual interacts with the ecosophies of others within a group who are working together towards a common goal, and c) to understand different kinds of discursive constraints within institutions and ways of overcoming those constraints to create lasting change in the kind of discourse that is acceptable. Also of vital importance is research into the effectiveness of leadership communication. It is a necessary condition of ethical leadership that words are used in ways that convey stories that align with the individual's ecosophy. However, that is not sufficient, since those stories must also be persuasive to the audience. Audience response research, therefore, is also necessary.

The understandings gained through this kind of further research could be infused in education of all kinds from primary to PhD level, in workplace professional development, and in the education of ecolinguists themselves. The pressing and urgent reason for doing this is that industrial civilisation is unsustainable and its future cannot be left in the hands of

a few individuals who society has designated as 'leaders'. Instead, we need individuals at all levels to question the stories that shape their self, workplace, community, and society, according to an ecosophy which considers not only humans but also other species and the physical environment. We need those individuals to contribute to the search for new stories to live by that can build an ecological civilisation that safeguards the ecosystems that all life depends on. In other words, in the wake of Covid as we reinvent society we need everyone to perform ethical leadership in all the situations that they find themselves in, and ecolinguistics can provide tools to contribute to that.

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