

This is a book summary (unpublished) by the author Arran Stibbe:

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ECOLINGUISTICS

language, ecology and the stories we live by

This is an informal companion to the new Routledge book Ecolinguistics: language, ecology and the stories we live by. It has been written by the author, Arran Stibbe, based on brief extracts and examples from the book.

Given the current trajectory of increasing inequality, over-consumption, and waste, profound changes are needed to hold back or reverse the tide of ecological destruction. The scale of change required goes far beyond small technical fixes such as more efficient cars. It requires the emergence of a different kind of society, based on different stories. If that is not possible, if the stories we live by are too entrenched to be changed, then we will need new stories to survive by, as the earth becomes increasingly hostile to human life and the lives of countless other species. This book explores how ecolinguistics can play a role in the reinvention of society along more ecological lines by revealing and challenging the *stories we live by*.

1. THE STORIES WE LIVE BY	What they are Stories in the minds of numerous people in a culture which influence how they think, talk and act.	Types of story Ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, and salience
Quotes: Stories are the key. To redirect the course of humanity, change the stories by which we live. (Korten 2006) ♦ We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling...We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009) ♦ It is all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not yet learned the new story. (Berry 1988) ♦ Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories that individuals or nations live by and you change the individuals and nations themselves (Okri 1996)		
Examples: The 'prosperity story' which promotes worship of material acquisition and money; the 'biblical story' which focuses on the after-life rather than the world around us; the 'security story' which builds up the military and police to protect relationships of domination; and the 'secular meaning story' which reduces life to matter and mechanism (Korten 2006) ♦ The most dangerous story we live by is 'the story of human centrality, of a species destined to be lord of all it surveys, unconfined by the limits that apply to other, lesser creatures'. (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009)		
Discussion question: Are the stories we live by unravelling? What stories are particularly problematic? Where can we look for new stories to live by?		

Ecolinguistics is an umbrella term for wide range of approaches, with different aims and goals. The form of ecolinguistics described in this book can be summed up as follows:

Ecolinguistics analyses language to reveal the stories we live by, judges those stories from an ecological perspective, resists damaging stories, and contributes to the search for new stories to live by.

The book covers eight types of story: ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure, and salience.

Type of story	What it is	What to look for
2. IDEOLOGY	a story about how the world <i>was, is</i> and <i>should be</i> , in the minds of members of a group	discourses, i.e., characteristic language features used by members of a group
<p>Example: PEOPLE ARE SELFISH. Consumers will want to purchase more of a good as its price goes down. ♦ We believe that these assumptions hold for most people in most situations... More is better than less: Goods are assumed to be desirable – i.e., to be <i>good</i>. Consequently, <i>consumers always prefer more of any good to less</i>. ♦ Consumers are never satisfied or satiated; <i>more is always better, even if just a little better</i>. ♦ People, both rich and poor, want more than they can have (from various economics textbooks)</p>		
<p>Example: MONEY BUYS HAPPINESS. Life isn't always neat and tidy. It's about laughing, crying, loving, dancing. So we've developed the new QuickClick tool change system to save you energy and time to enjoy what we've all been put into the world to do. Live. (vacuum cleaner advertisement)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: What stories are we told by the groups that make up our society? By economists, advertisers, conservative politicians, environmental campaigners, bankers, nature writers etc. Are these stories destructive, ambivalent or beneficial?</p>		

Ideologies, in the sense of the term used in this book, are stories shared by specific groups. The ideologies reveal themselves through discourses, which are characteristic forms of language used by groups or institutions. Kress (2010, p. 110) describes how discourses construct 'meaning about the world from an institutional position' and are 'meaning-resources available in society to make sense of the world, social and natural'. The types of institution he has in mind include education, medicine, science, law, the church, and 'less tangibly, institutions such as "the family"'. Even less tangibly, though still usefully, we could include schools of art and writing, such as Chinese Shan Shui, Japanese nature haiku, or New Nature Writing, particularly when the movements are coordinated by members through mutual praise, criticism and imitation. All these institutions have their own characteristic ways of using language and visual images which give clues to reveal their underlying ideologies.

Type of story 3. FRAMING	What it is	What to look for
	the use of a source frame (a packet of knowledge) to structure a target domain	Trigger words which bring a particular source frame to mind.
Example: Instead of treating the climate crisis as an environmental issue, to be dealt with by environment and energy departments alone, we need to reframe it as the overwhelming threat to national and global security which it is (Caroline Lucas)		
Example: Call climate change what it is: violence. Climate change is global-scale violence, against places and species as well as against human beings. (Rebecca Solnit)		
Example: Let's reframe sustainability as the biggest and boldest supply chain challenge yet, to give the 9 billion people we expect to see on the planet quality and sustainable lives. Business is good at giving customers what they want, so let's get on with it. (Alan Knight, Virgin)		
Example: The best solution, nearly all scientists agree, would be the simplest: stop burning fossil fuels, which would reduce the amount of carbon we dump into the atmosphere. (Michael Specter)		
Example: It has been revealed that mankind's activities giving rise to our present global warming and climate change predicament occurred during that extremely short 57 year period. (Bob Robertson)		

Framings are stories about a specific area of life that make use of small packets of general knowledge called frames. Climate change could be framed as an environmental issue, a security threat, a problem, or a predicament, and in each case how we think about climate change is different.

“Many things we’ve conceptualized as problems are actually predicaments. The difference is that a problem calls for a solution; the only question is whether one can be found and made to work, and once this is done, the problem is solved. A predicament, by contrast, has no solution. Faced with a predicament, people come up with responses. (John Michael Greer)”

Source Frame: Problem Problem Solution Structure: when the solution is found the problem disappears	Target domain: Climate change Climate change Stop burning fossil fuels Entailment: if we stop burning fossil fuels then climate change will disappear
Source Frame: Predicament Predicament Response Structure: whatever the response the predicament remains	Target domain: Climate change Climate change Close knit communities, adaptation Entailment: even if we adapt and create stronger communities we will still need to deal with the consequences of climate change

Type of story	What it is	What to look for?
4. METAPHOR	a type of framing where the source frame is from a concretely imaginable area of life that is distinctly different from the target domain.	Trigger words that bring the source frame to mind
Example: [Earth is] a single spaceship, without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution (Kenneth Boulding)		
Example: Defusing the Global Warming TIME BOMB (Jim Hansen)		
Example: The planet may have reached the peak of the climate change rollercoaster and it may be a fast and unpleasant ride from now on. It may possibly be a ride that we cannot live through (Robert Kyriakides).		
Example: turning down the global thermostat, fix our atmosphere, fixing the climate, technological fix, toolkit, and tool-box (from Nerlich and Jaspal)		
More examples: hothouses, greenhouses, atmospheric blankets and holes, sinks and drains, flipped and flickering switches, conveyor belts and bathtub effects, tipping points and time bombs, ornery and angry beasts, rolled dice, sleeping drunks, and even bungee jumpers attached to speeding rollercoasters...an “ornery” or “angry beast”, which humans are poking with sticks, a slippery slope (adapted from Russill)		

In addition to the clever technologies, wily policies and ethical revaluations that we shall need to respond to environmental crisis, we shall need better, less anthropocentric metaphors. (Garrard 2012, p. 205)

Metaphors are a type of framing which can be particularly powerful and vivid since they use a specific, concrete and clearly distinct frame to think about an area of life, for example CLIMATE CHANGE IS A TIME BOMB, CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROLLERCOASTER, or CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN ANGRY BEAST.

Source Frame: Rollercoaster

Rollercoaster
 Carriage
 Passengers
 Structure: once started the passengers cannot stop a rollercoaster

Target domain: Climate change

Climate Change
 The planet
 Us
 Entailment: It is too late to do anything about climate change

Source Frame: Time Bomb

Bomb
 Defusing the bomb

 Explosion
 Victims
 Defuser
 Structure: limited time to defuse bomb before instant and unstoppable harm to victims

Target domain: Climate change

Climate Change
 reverse pollution and keep carbon emissions level
 coastlines will be inundated
 large proportion of the world’s people
 Us?
 Entailment: limited time to reduce carbon emissions before coastlines are inundated harming a large proportion of the world’s people

The term *evaluations* is used in this book to mean stories in people’s minds about whether a particular area of life is good or bad. Cognitive evaluations do not involve a careful weighing up of evidence about whether something is good or bad, but are associations that we have in memory, e.g. that honesty is good and lying is bad. When these stories are widespread across a culture then they are cultural evaluations – stories about what is good or bad that have become conventional. There are countless cultural evaluations that are built into common ways of talking about areas of social life, such as ECONOMIC GROWTH IS GOOD, RETAIL SALES ARE GOOD, INCREASED PROFITS ARE GOOD, FAST IS GOOD and CONVENIENCE IS GOOD. Once cultural evaluations become established there is a danger that the reason why certain things are considered positive and others negative is forgotten. It becomes habitual to welcome the ‘good news’ that Christmas sales are high, without considering the cost to the environment or the problems of burgeoning personal debt; or to welcome the ‘good news’ that the profits of an ecologically destructive and exploitative corporation have risen.

Type of story 5. EVALUATION	What it is	What to look for
<p>Example: LOW SALES ARE BAD. appalling, slump, horror show, sobering, plagued, plunged, fears, disastrous, turmoil, dire, headache, suffered, hurt, deteriorating, disappointed, gloomy, worries, dismal, decline (<i>press reaction to decrease in sales by Tesco, Morrisons and M&S</i>)</p>		
<p>Example: SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD Fed up with wet summers and ice cold winters? Take a break from the traditional British weather and get away for all-year-round sunshine holidays. Choose from the sun-soaked shores. You can enjoy great sunshine holidays at any time of year...for action packed sun holidays (<i>travel agent</i>)</p>		
<p>Example: RAIN IS GOOD 夜はうれしく / 昼は静かや / 春の雨 Joyful at night / tranquil during the day / spring rain (Chora)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: What areas of life does our culture represent as good or bad (e.g., success, convenience, progress, speed, the past)? Which do we need to rethink?</p>		

Type of story	What it is	What to look for
6. IDENTITY	a story in people's minds about what it means to be a particular kind of person	forms of language which characterise people
<p>Example: THE IDEAL MAN IS MUSCULAR. Sweet science of beefing up. Steak is a reliable weapon in the battle to bulk up, with protein and creatine arming your muscular growth (<i>Men's Health</i>)</p>		
<p>Example: PEOPLE ARE PART OF NATURE. In the mizzling weather I take to walking in the dusk. Sometimes I catch glimpses of other dusk-haunters: a few spring moths, a late departing woodcock, long-eared bats, flickering shapes (<i>Richard Mabey, Nature Cure</i>)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: What stories do we tell about who we are, and about what it means to be human? Which stories are beneficial or destructive?</p>		

Identities are stories about who we are as people, particularly about the groups that we belong to, and the place of those groups in society. Advertisers exploit identity when they attempt to persuade consumers that purchase of particular products is necessary not for the utility of the goods themselves but to become a particular kind of person. Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 167) describe how 'Consumption becomes a means of articulating a sense of identity, and, perhaps even more crucially, *distinction* from others.' In this way, the language and images of advertising encourage people to use their consumption to demonstrate that they belong to a desirable 'ingroup' of people which is better than other 'outgroups'. On the other hand, there are also texts, such as certain forms of nature writing, which construct much broader *ecological identities*, where readers are positioned as being part of the wide ingroup of the 'community of life'.

The term *convictions* is used to refer to stories in our minds about whether a particular description of reality is true, likely, unlikely or false. Convictions are not about whether something is objectively true, but whether we believe it to be so, and the degree of certainty that we have about this belief. An example discussed was of a particular description of reality that is of key importance for the future: 'climate change is caused by humans'. There are various forces in society which represent this description as an absolute truth, as uncertain, or a definite falsehood. Potter describes how groups attempt to present their own account as 'solid, neutral, independent of the speaker, and to be merely mirroring some aspect of the world' (Potter 1996, p. 1), while undermining the accounts of other groups as 'lies, delusions, mistakes, flattery, deceptions and misrepresentations' (p.112). Both environmentalists and climate change 'deniers' are trying to influence the convictions that individuals have in their mind, and the more general convictions across numerous people's minds.

Type of story	What it is	What to look for
7. CONVICTION	A story in people's minds about whether a particular description is true, certain, uncertain, or false.	Facticity patterns, i.e., linguistic patterns that represent a description as true, uncertain or false
<p>Example: It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century (<i>IPPC AR5</i>).</p>		
<p>Example: The notion of anthropogenic climate change is a fraud - the idea that the planet is getting warmer and that human activity is somehow responsible is a pseudo-scientific fraud, it's a big lie, it's a monstrosity (<i>Webster Tarpley in the film The Obama Deception</i>).</p>		
<p>Example: It is conceivable that Caroline started her firm because of an altruistic desire. More likely, Caroline started her business to make money. Caroline's objective is to make her firm's profit as large as possible. (<i>economics textbook</i>)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: What important descriptions are being battled over in terms of whether they are true, certain, uncertain or false?</p>		

Type of story	What it is	What to look for
8. ERASURE	a story in people's minds that something is unimportant or unworthy of consideration	Erasure patterns, i.e., patterns of language which erase or background something in texts
<p>Example: NATURAL RESOURCES ARE UNIMPORTANT. It hardly needs pointing out that the goods and services that consumers purchase do not simply materialise out of the blue. In large measure they have to be produced...The essential fact about production is so obvious that it hardly needs stating: it involves the use of services of various sorts to generate output...Clearly the manner in which production is organised has important social and political as well as economic aspects (<i>economics textbook</i>)</p>		
<p>Example: NATURE IS UNIMPORTANT. Urban greenspace amenity, living and physical environments, environmental resources, the diversity of benthic habitats, seasonally grazed floodplains, aquatic habitat types, timber, biomass, assemblages of species (<i>from environmental reports</i>)</p>		
<p>Example: ANIMALS ARE UNIMPORTANT. The breeding sow should be thought of as, and treated as, a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine (<i>Walls meat company</i>)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: Which important areas of life tend to be erased in the texts that make up the culture we are part of?</p>		

Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 5) describe being *critical* as ‘denaturalising the language to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts.’ Sometimes the absences in a text are as important as the ideas and assumptions that are actually present. *Erasure* is where stories in people’s minds treat something as unimportant, marginal, irrelevant or inconsequential. The story manifests itself linguistically when something that is present in reality is systematically suppressed, backgrounded or erased from language. Of key importance for ecolinguistics is the erasure of the natural world from texts of all kinds, from microeconomics textbooks to, perhaps surprisingly, ecological assessment reports. That is not the only concern, however. There is also the erasure of humans and social justice issues in environmental texts, which conveys a story that alleviation of poverty is not an important consideration in environmental action.

The final kind of story is *salience*, where stories in the mind represent something prominently, as important and worthy of consideration. Ecolinguistics itself can be considered an attempt to increase the salience of the more-than-human world within a mainstream linguistics which tends to focus on the role of language in human interaction without considering the larger ecological context.

Type of story	What it is	What to look for
9. SALIENCE	a story that something is important or worthy of consideration	salience patterns, i.e., patterns of language which foreground an area of life
<p>Example: ANIMALS ARE IMPORTANT. Chickens are inquisitive, interesting animals who are as intelligent as mammals such as cats, dogs, and even some primates. 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 (<i>PETA</i>).</p>		
<p>Example: ANIMALS ARE IMPORTANT. The starling I personally knew was Max...I think of the nature of his character, the exquisite sweetness of his evening solos as well as the extraordinary beauty of the bird, the gilded feathers, the neatness of wing as he flew. (<i>Esther Woolfson</i>)</p>		
<p>Discussion question: Which areas of life do we give prominence to in our culture and which are erased? How can we use language to give greater prominence to areas that are typically overlooked or erased?</p>		

Overall, the premise of this book is that ecolinguistic analysis can be useful in exposing the stories we live by, questioning them from an ecological perspective, challenging them, and searching for the new stories that are necessary to thrive in the conditions of the world we face. The book itself aims to encourage linguists to consider ecological issues, and equally importantly to encourage a diverse range of people who are concerned with ecological issues to consider the role of language in both causing and responding to those issues.

Glossary

The book contains a full glossary of more than 100 linguistic terms which are useful for ecolinguistic analysis. The following is a selection of them:

Activation: Participants are activated when they are represented as doing, thinking, feeling and saying things, rather than having things done to them. Useful in investigating which participants are foregrounded in a text.

Affect: In appraisal patterns, expressions of affect represent participants as feeling a certain way towards something (e.g., delighted by X, or devastated by X).

Appraisal pattern: A cluster of linguistic features which come together to represent an area of life as good or bad.

Appraising item: A word or expression which is used to shed a positive or negative light on someone or something (e.g. in *He welcomed the good news*, both 'welcomed' and 'good' are appraisal items which give positivity to 'the news').

Camera angle: A high camera angle in a photograph is one where the camera is high up, looking down on the subject, whereas a low angle looks up at the subject. The camera angle can represent the subject as powerful (low angle) or powerless (high angle).

Conviction: A story in people's minds about whether a particular description is true, certain, uncertain, or false.

Cultural evaluations: Evaluations that are widespread across the minds of multiple individuals in a culture.

Ecosophy: An ecological philosophy, i.e., a normative set of principles and assumptions about relationships among humans, other forms of life and the physical environment. Analysts use their own ecosophy to judge the stories that they reveal through linguistic analysis.

Ecolinguistics: An umbrella term for approaches that investigate language and various kinds of interaction. The form of ecolinguistics described in this module analyses language to reveal the stories-we-live-by, judges those stories according to an ecosophy, resists stories which oppose the ecosophy, and contributes to the search for new stories to live by.

Erasure: A story in people's minds that an area of life is unimportant or unworthy of attention.

Erasure pattern: A linguistic representation of an area of life as irrelevant, marginal or unimportant through its systematic absence or distortion in text.

Evaluations: Stories in people's minds about whether an area of life is good or bad.

Facticity: The degree to which a description is presented as a certain and established truth (e.g. through the use of high modality, calls to authority, or the repertoire of empiricism).

Facticity pattern: A cluster of linguistic devices which come together to represent descriptions as certain or true, or to undermine descriptions as uncertain or false.

Frame: A story about an area of life that is brought to mind by particular trigger words.

Framing: The use of a story from one area of life (a frame) to structure how another area of life is conceptualised (e.g. CLIMATE CHANGE IS A PROBLEM).

Identity: A story in people's minds about what it means to be a particular kind of person, including appearance, character, behaviour and values.

Impersonalisation: The act of representing a social actor as a replaceable member of a category rather than a unique individual. Useful for investigating erasure.

Individualisation: The representation of an entity as a single, unique individual.

Liminal state: In identity theory, a person is in a liminal state when they feel the identity they once had no longer applies to them but have not yet found a new identity to replace it.

Mask: A form of erasure where an entity has been omitted from a text or discourse and replaced by a distorted version of itself.

Metaphor: The use of a frame from a specific, concrete and imaginable area of life to structure how a clearly distinct area of life is conceptualised (e.g. CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROLLERCOASTER).

Metaphorical reasoning: The use of knowledge from the source frame in reasoning about the target domain (e.g. In the source frame of 'machines', there is the knowledge that *machines have no feelings*. If this is carried over to the target domain of 'pigs' by a PIGS ARE MACHINES metaphor then it can lead to the metaphorical entailment *pigs have no feelings*).

Modality: The level of certainty expressed by the speaker about the truth of a statement, typically through the use of modal auxiliaries (*can, could, may, might, must, ought, shall, should, will, or would*) or adverbs (*probably, arguably*).

Nominalisation: A noun phrase which can be thought of as derived from an underlying process (e.g. *destruction* derives from *X destroys Y*). Useful in investigating erasure since both X and Y can be omitted in the nominalised form.

Passivation: Participants are passivated when they are represented as having something done to them rather than actively doing or thinking things. Useful in investigating which participants are backgrounded in a text.

Phenomenon: The participant that is seen, heard, felt or otherwise perceived as part of a mental process, e.g. in *I saw the owl* 'the owl' is the Phenomenon.

Presupposition: The representation of a proposition as an obvious, taken-for-granted, background fact about the world.

Re-framing: The act of framing a concept in a way that is different from its typical framing in a culture.

Re-minding: Explicitly calling attention to the erasure of an important area of life in a particular text or discourse, and demanding that it be brought back into consideration.

Salience: A story in people's minds that an area of life is important or worthy of attention.

Salience pattern: A linguistic or visual representation of an area of life as worthy of attention through concrete, specific and vivid depictions.

Self-identity: An evolving story people tell themselves and others about what kind of person they are.

Shot size: In visual images, shot size is the size of a subject compared to the size of the frame. The larger the subject, the closer the shot, which can indicate a close relationship with the viewer.

Source frame: The area of life which is being drawn from to provide words and structures in a metaphor or framing (e.g. in *CLIMATE CHANGE IS A TIME BOMB* the source frame is 'a time bomb').

Stake: When a participant has an interest in a particular outcome occurring (e.g. the fossil fuel lobby has an interest in climate change legislation being weakened).

Story: A cognitive structure in the minds of individuals which influences how they perceive the world. Types of story include ideologies, metaphors, framings, identities, evaluations, convictions, erasure and salience.

Story-we-live-by: A story in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture.

Target domain: The area of life being described in a metaphor (e.g. in *CLIMATE CHANGE IS A TIMEBOMB* the target domain is 'climate change').

Transitivity: The arrangement of participants and processes in a clause.

Void: A form of erasure where an entity is entirely absent from a text or discourse.

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