



Book Review

Robert Poole, *Corpus-Assisted Ecolinguistics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2022; ISBN: 978-1-3501-3855-1

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Over the last few years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, ecolinguistic studies have experienced an explosion in terms of quantity and quality (Zhang, 2022). The pandemic itself, the incessant fires that have consumed large portions of green areas, and catastrophic floods that destroy villages and towns, just to mention a few, constitute a context that calls for action on several fronts to modify the prevailing system of thought. And in this regard, linguistics and discourse studies have a lot to contribute.

Ecolinguistics, as a discipline, is not only highly topical in this matter but also a key tool to face the current climate crisis, with its power to shape social constructions of the world. Robert Poole's proposal constitutes exactly that: an effective tool for analysis of linguistic-discursive material that makes possible to work with corpora of large dimensions. Combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives, Poole illustrates the multiple applications corpus studies can offer to disciplines such as ecolinguistics for discourse analysis, but also for the construction of new, non-destructive representations of nonhuman animals and the environment. The cases analysed by Poole include data collections, journalistic material, literary works and cartographic categorizations; and the proposed methodology operates both synchronously and diachronically. The selection of cases was carried out, according to Poole, in response to the need for addressing spaces and techniques barely explored within the field of ecolinguistics. A large part of the work developed in corpus studies tend to focus on specific contexts of the climate change discourse. For this reason, the author argues for the need to analyse less visited discursive nooks to investigate the prevalence of industrial and commercial representations of nature, nonhuman animals and geographical places that hide in the current use of the English language.

Chapter 1, entitled "An Introduction to Ecolinguistics and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study", describes the historical development of ecolinguistics, corpus linguistics and corpus-assisted discourse studies. This three-fold presentation aims to introduce the basic

characteristics of the three subdisciplines and establish the inter-relationships, guiding the analysis in the following chapters. The journey begins with a broad definition of ecolinguistics, starting from the position adopted by Einar Haugen, and continues problematizing the term and the different streams encompassed in it. The history traced by Poole not only considers the birth of the discipline in the 1970s but also delves into the origin of the thought that gave rise to the development of the field, reviewing the theories of Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Charles Darwin and Ernst Haeckel, revisiting its importance as base of current linguistic and ecological thought. It then addresses twentieth-century American sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic studies, with Schutz Jr. and Voegelin (1967) as references in the ecology of languages from a sociocultural perspective, while also considering the work of Rachel Carson (1962) and her environmental perspective. Speaking of ecolinguistics in the strict sense, the line developed by Poole takes as initial reference the words of Haugen (1972) and Halliday (1990) to consider the impact of one of the first publications to include the word “ecolinguistics” in its title, namely, *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment* (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001). This book puts in motion the debate on the specificity of the discipline, since it presents an enormous multiplicity of approaches.

This first chapter continues with a presentation of corpus linguistics, a subdiscipline not widely used by ecolinguists — in fact, sometimes rejected by discourse analysts — presenting an automatic method for large collections of linguistic data. In support of this, Pool brings evidence provided by researchers across the social sciences, highlighting the widespread acceptance these methods have gained in recent years in studies of political and social discourse, immigration, Western representations of the Middle East, discourses on war, etc. In this sense, the author constantly emphasizes his interest in the study of language in use, basing his approach on a systemic-functional perspective and his definition of language as a resource for meaning in social interaction (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Following Halliday, Poole seeks to systematically analyse the choices that speakers make when using the English language, with a focus on large samples.

Chapter 2, “Corpus-Assisted Ecolinguistics”, explores the existing research conducted in the field, establishing connections between corpus-assisted discourse studies and ecolinguistics, while introducing the methodology that will be developed in the analysis chapters. The corpus is defined in terms of relevance to ecological discourse studies. The applied analytical techniques are oriented towards the identification of particular linguistic patterns that normalize and reproduce attitudes, ideologies, and social practices, contributing negatively to the representation of identities in our relationship with nonhuman animals and the environment. In other words, the corpus is defined as “discourses that propose negative, harmful stories”. This is done while also adopting a theoretical framework and methodology that account for the construction of alternative discourses and histories.

In Chapter 3, “A Corpus-Assisted Diachronic Analysis of Representations of Wilderness”, the author develops a temporal analysis of the term “wilderness” over a

period of two hundred years, analysing tokens recorded in the corpus of Google Books and the Corpus of Historical American English. The process identifies the most frequent uses of the term as an adjective during the period from 1810 to 2010, using Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient to empirically assess decade-by-decade development and frequency. The analysis reveals multiple variations in usage patterns, as well as changes in the frames of appearance starting from 1950. Consequently, the method's relevance for examining a diachronic corpus is effectively demonstrated, while also allowing for the identification of possible explanations for the term's transformations in meaning over the considered period, taking its context into account.

Chapter 4, "Corpus-Assisted Ecolinguistics for Literary Texts: A Keyness Analysis of Richard Powers' *The Overstory*", presents a stylistic analysis of the text, integrating ecolinguistics and stylistics with corpus-assisted techniques to explore the discursive construction of trees and forests as social beings, showing how they manifest agency and act as animated characters. In the analysis of Richard Powers' work, the connection between humans and nature is evidenced as a beneficial relationship for the development of sustainable forms of life. This chapter emphasizes the inherent difficulties of carrying out a linguistic analysis of literary texts and its particularities, while also presenting possible solutions.

Chapter 5, "Roving Beasts and Bolting Bovines: Wordplay in the Reporting of Animal Escapes", focuses on the analysis of a corpus of articles related to nonhuman animals that are exploited by different industries and flee from human captivity. This corpus is mainly a collection of journalistic articles in which animals, mostly cows, flee from their death in slaughterhouses, with the addition of an episode of penguins escaping from a zoo in Denmark. The methodology focuses on reviewing puns, references, and frames adopted by journalists to trivialize and minimize the suffering of nonhuman animals, which mitigate the perceived cruelty and make the texts more palatable to an uncommitted audience. This case demonstrates the usefulness of corpus-assisted studies for analysing discourses with large or extensive collections of material. Finally, the chapter concludes with an alternative approach to these discourses that minimize nonhuman suffering, considering possibilities for a "veganization" of the press.

Chapter 6, "Geographical Text Analysis for Corpus-Assisted Ecolinguistics", investigates the representations of place within environmental communication. Specifically, the work investigates the references of place names contained in texts specialized in the protection and conservation of iconic places in the United States. Considering that geographical mentions can be related to commercial purposes, claims of ancestral rights, references to nature, etc., the study examines mentions and associations with different nodes (commercial, native-ancestral, nonhuman animals and nature) in a corpus of 1437 posts in dedicated blogs.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents general conclusions with some reflections about ecolinguistics' labour. First, conclusions of the preceding chapters are reviewed and evaluated considering the usefulness that the method can provide to discourse studies.

Subsequently, the problems associated with each of the corpora analysed and their possible applications for the proposal of alternative discourses are also discussed.

In light of this review, Robert Poole's work can be considered of great importance for two main reasons: i) it reintroduces in a very useful and evidence-based way a method that has been traditionally rejected by critical discourse studies, making clear that, in a world full of information, automatic analysis becomes a fundamental tool to break through a sea of data; ii) it shows how the relevance and depth of the corpora analysed are not a mere excuse to prove the validity of the method. Instead, the cases and the results presented have intrinsic value that ought to be accounted for. In this sense, corpus-assisted ecolinguistics not only offers a new approach for both ecolinguistics and critical discourse studies, which are still exploring broad frameworks, but also serves as a guide for any discipline that claims to be "critical" in the big data era.

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