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Ecolinguistics:
The Linguistics of the Twenty-first Century

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Introduction

` The 'eco' in 'Ecolinguistics' stands for 'ecology' and 'ecological', as such Ecolinguistics is also called 'ecological linguistics'. When ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment (Ecological Society of America), the primary purpose of language is to facilitate communication and the study of language -- how it is put together and how it functions -- is called linguistics (www.sil.org). The British Ecological Society rightly states: "Ecology helps us understand how the world works. It provides useful evidence on the interdependence between people and the natural world and, as well the consequences of human activity on the environment." This article examines how Ecolinguistics is poised to address key ecological issues concerning the conservation, promotion, and degradation of ecosystems and the role language plays in them or should play.

Ecological Crisis: The Most Alarming Existential Crisis of the 21st Century

There can be no two opinions that the most alarming crisis facing the globe today is ecological crisis, which has questioned the very continuity of the human species on the Earth. Humans, the most ingenious species on Earth, have violated Nature, which has resulted in shrinking habitats, exploitation of natural resources, climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) --- the representative body of 195 countries and the science arm of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)--- has warned in its Special Report October 2018 that the Earth would reach the crucial threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels by as early as 2030, precipitating the risk of extreme drought, wildfires, floods and food shortages for hundreds of millions of people, unless remedial steps both at global and local levels are implemented.

In addition, the UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) media report, released on 7th May 2019, finds that as many as 1,000,000 species have been threatened with extinction, thereby jeopardizing human existence. The safety net of biodiversity, as found by IPBES, is stretched almost to a breaking point, and "the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems" are declining fast.

The significant finding of the IPBES is that there is an inextricable link between loss of biodiversity and climate change. It claims that the world can reverse this biodiversity crisis only by proactive environmental policies, sustainable production of food and other resources, and a concerted effort to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Undeniably, environmentally responsible economic development is the only way to ensure a sustainable future for people and the planet.

Issues like climate change, global warming, biodiversity loss, and language loss are globally defining issues at the present moment. Climate change and global warming have issued forth from irresponsible human activities and consequently have threatened the very existence of millions of species on the planet, including humans. Humans are justifiably blamed for the ecological crisis as their greed for colossal, unsustainable development and wealth generation has rendered themselves an endangered species. The problem precisely is that the ecology is full of environmental concerns. Loss of biodiversity, language death, loss of diverse species of flora and fauna, and degradation of ecosystems are all interconnected. The only remedy lies in reversing the trend, as envisioned in the IPBES Conceptual Framework --- "by connecting nature and people" (Díaz et al., 2015) and "by valuing nature's contributions to people" (Pascual, U. et al. 2017).

The mindless decline of Nature and degeneration of ecosystems by human activities have precipitated the present crisis of loss of biodiversity. Boundless consumption of nature has left it unprotected, and unsustainable use of nature has told upon human condition. If Nature provides us food for us to eat, air to breathe, water to drink, it is our duty to respect Nature rather than exploit it beyond repair. Consequent upon our untenable acts, we have ruined ecology and left it substantially devoid of plant and animal species, irreplaceable habitats, life-saving herbs and plants. The IPBES's finding that nature is being eroded at rates unprecedented in human history is rather alarming. Sir Robert Watson, the chair of the IPBES and former chair of the IPCC, has rightly claimed:

The IPBES assessment has shown the strong interrelationship between climate change, the loss of biodiversity and human wellbeing. Climate change has been identified as a primary driver of biodiversity loss, already altering every part of nature. Likewise, the loss of biodiversity contributes to climate change, for example when we destroy forests, we emit carbon dioxide, the major "human-produced" greenhouse gas. (*The Guardian*, 6th May 2019)

The globe, which is an ecosystem of ecosystems, is in huge crisis. If unsustainable development in the world has engendered ecological crisis, the solution to this global problem lies in sustainable development.

Sustainable Development -- the Solution to Ecological Crisis

Depletion of natural resources for development has given birth to ecological crises. The UN, which is the world government, affirms that sustainable develop is the answer to all the problems. A popular definition of sustainable development comes from the report by the Bruntland Commission in *Our Common Future*: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the

present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly, 1987, p. 43). It has been rightly said that sustainable development is based on the three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental and social sustainability. The UN's agenda for sustainable development, commonly known as 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, unanimously adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, sets 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for member nations.

All the nations of the world through the UN agreed to be action-oriented to achieve the universal and transformative goals and targets:

> We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations. (www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

The world governments further resolve:

We envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable… One in which development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.

Sustainable development is the be all and end all (Baker, 2005). The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs along with 169 targets came into effect on 1st January 2016.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are presented below:

GOAL 1: No Poverty; GOAL 2: Zero Hunger; GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being; GOAL 4: Quality Education; GOAL 5: Gender Equality; GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality; GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production; GOAL 13: Climate Action; GOAL 14: Life Below Water; GOAL 15: Life on Land; GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions; and GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal.

These 17 sustainable development goals associate 169 targets for all the nations of the world to achieve by 2030 (https: //sustainabledevelopment.un.org/).

It is found that nations of the world have significantly worked to implement the SDGs. However, it is felt that critiquing the unsustainable practices and communicating successful sustainable cases or

best practices are crucial for public awareness and community action. For this, we are in dire need of a linguistics -- a linguistics dedicated to sustainability -- which can study both unsustainable anthropocentric actions and communications that harm the ecology as much as the sustainable practices that help the restoration and revival of biodiversity and other ecosystems. We need a linguistics to address the major concerns of the 21st century, a linguistics which can examine the role played by language in exposing unsustainability and promoting sustainable discourses. This article argues that Ecolinguistics is the best genre of linguistics that can address the issue of sustainability properly, by examining discourses that promote or destroy nature.

Ecolinguistics: Ecology, Language, and Sustainability

A new paradigm of Linguistics that emerged in the 1990s, Ecolinguistics or ecological linguistics is the "study of language according to the environment it is used in" (Derni, 2008). It investigates the role of language in the development and possible solution of ecological and environmental problems (Fill, 1993 in Al-Gayoni, 2012:28). As the greatest pioneer of Ecolinguistics, Prof. Arran Stibbe (2015) claims, Ecolinguistics questions the stories that lead to ecological destruction and undermine linguistic diversity and offers positive alternate stories to live by. Ecolinguistics attempts to strike at the very causes of dichotomy between language and its environment. It analyzes linguistic texts or discourses from the ecological perspective --- sources and resources including advertising or commercials, (un)sustainable development, climate change, ecological conservation, ecosystems (e.g., lakes, rivers, etc.), environmental issues, greenification of deserts and desertification of greenery, and production of energy/alternate sources of energy from unsustainable materials (e.g. solid waste) as well as consumption patterns in society. Ecolinguistics studies the impact of language on ecology and the underlying causes of sustenance or destruction. Thus, Ecolinguistics differs from other forms of linguistics insofar as it focuses on the ecological context of the language, language ecology, and sustainable development for a green earth and healthy coexistence of all beings.

Ecolinguistics, as Dr Arran Stibbe observed in his seminal book *Ecolinguistics: language, ecology and the stories we live by*, offers framework to ecolinguists to study the very stories that the people or a community lives by as well as opportunities to replace the destructive stories by stories that promote ecological sustainability and community development (Stibbe, 2015). As we see, Ecolinguistics links the study of language with ecology. This is done in two ways: on the one hand, 'ecology' is used metaphorically for a study of the dynamic processes which can be observed in language contact situations on both the societal and the individual levels; on the other hand, ecolinguistics analyses environmental discourse from a critical point of view. In both strands of ecolinguistics, the term 'ecological' is understood to mean 'focusing on interrelation and diversity'.

Ecolinguistics studies texts or discourses, community practices, and events from the combined perspectives of ecology and language function (Alexander, 2009; Alexander, 2010). It is a kind of interdisciplinary critical discourse analysis. As Stibbe (2015) puts it: "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." Ecolinguistics has evolved

from the analysis of ecological discourse to the ecological analysis of discourse (Alexander and Stibbe, 2014; Chen, 2016). In this context, it can be said firmly that Ecolinguistics is the linguistics of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Ecolinguistics has fulfilled the role of a linguistics that is booth ideal and pragmatic. By encouraging linguists, anthropologists, and ordinary people to carry out extraordinary work to help Nature by sustainable activities, Ecolinguistics has provided framework, tools, and techniques which no other linguistics has ever offered.

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