



## ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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### Linguistic and extralinguistic implementation of environmental activism in the English language media discourse of Russia, China and Southeast Asia

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**Abstract.** The research focuses on the analysis of the English language media discourse dedicated to the problem of environmental activism in the present-day emerging countries of Russia, China and other Southeast Asian states. The main purpose of the study is to understand the linguistic and non-linguistic implementation of the phenomenon of environmental activism in developing countries through the English language media perspective. Taking into account the role of the English language as a lingua franca in the world today, the research hypothesizes that the English language media discourse has turned into an influential tool of the promotion of green sustainable ideas, including environmental activism in the states with the emerging economies. The findings of the study received through the quantitative and qualitative data processing in the software program “QDA Minor”, proved that the English language media discourse can affect the evolution of people’s eco-consciousness in the emerging countries like Russia, China and other states of Southeast Asia. Despite having different ideological values and national and international strategic purposes, the countries with the developing economies are getting used to the ideas of environmental activism and begin to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.

**Keywords:** environmental activism, English language, media discourse, emerging countries, green ideology



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## **Лингвистическая и экстралингвистическая имплементация экологического активизма в англоязычном медиадискурсе России, Китая и Юго-Восточной Азии**

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается роль современного англоязычного медиадискурса в продвижении идей экологического активизма в современных развивающихся странах на примере России, Китая и государств Юго-Восточной Азии. Основная цель исследования заключается в осмыслении и анализе лингвистических и экстралингвистических составляющих феномена экологического активизма в развивающихся странах сквозь призму восприятия информации в англоязычных СМИ, функционирующих на территории исследуемых государственных образований. Принимая во внимание роль английского языка как языка международного общения, или *lingua franca*, в современном мире, настоящее исследование выдвигает гипотезу о том, что англоязычный медиадискурс превратился во влиятельный инструмент продвижения экологически дружественных, зеленых идей, включая экологический активизм, в регионах с развивающейся экономикой. Результаты качественного и количественного анализа эмпирических данных в компьютерной программе QDA Minog доказали, что англоязычный медиадискурс способен оказать влияние на эволюцию экологического сознания людей в развивающихся странах. Несмотря на различные идеологические ценности и национальные и международные стратегические цели, страны с развивающейся экономикой (Россия, Китай и другие национальные государства Юго-Восточной Азии) постепенно адаптируются к идеям экологического активизма и начинают внедрять более устойчивую экологическую политику на своей территории.

**Ключевые слова:** экологический активизм, англоязычный медиадискурс, развивающиеся страны, зеленая идеология, экологическое сознание

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## Introduction

Environmental activism is an integral part of human life in the 21st century. The idea of the pro-environmental behaviour which is close to the concept of the human's "identification with nature", was born due to multiple ecological concerns which the globe has faced in recent decades, i.e. rising sea levels, climate change, environmental pollution, toxic wastes, deforestation and many other issues. One of the most important conductors and mediators of environmental activism and green ideas has become the English language as the language of the international communication and a strong popularizer of various global agendas including environmental issues and a sustainable development ideology on the planet. Moreover, the English language media have turned out to be a unique digital platform which united different countries and nations across the world in trying to find solutions to environmental threats and disasters. The World Englishes<sup>1</sup> of the third millennium, as well as the English language media channels, are being actively used by billions of people in different corners of the planet for the work in collaboration in social, scientific, political and conservational fields.

Thus, **the main purpose of this research** is to estimate how the present-day English language media discourse helps to accelerate the environmental activism and pro-environmental behaviour in emerging countries on the example of Russian Federation, China and the states of Southeast Asia.

The research questions raised in the article are the following ones:

RQ1. Can the English language as a lingua franca and the speculation of the environmental concerns and environmental activism in the English language media discourse unite the ecological policy of the emerging countries?

RQ2. Are there big differences in the environmental language used in each of the emerging countries and how are they represented in the English language media discourse?

RQ3. How is environmental activism introduced on linguistic and non-linguistic levels in the English language media of Russia, China and Southeast Asia and how can it affect the local cultures, national languages and ideology of these countries in a more eco-friendly way?

We hypothesize that the English language of the third millennium in its correlations with the global media discourse is making a significant impact on the constructive development of peoples' environmental activism and pro-environmental behaviour in the modern emerging countries.

*The language of environmental activism in present-day Russia, China and East Asian countries.* Although the notion "environmental activism" is not inter-

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<sup>1</sup> World Englishes. *Wikipedia*. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Englishes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Englishes) (accessed: 10.02.2021).

preted consistently by scholars [1], nevertheless, in general, this concept means “environmental efforts which are typically not restricted to the critique of environmental problems but also include attempts, efforts and actions to solve those problems, leading to a broader concern with the policies and politics of sustainable transitions” [Ibid.].

Thousands of people around the world contribute to the protection of nature every day. They solve problems of different scales. For example, someone collects batteries in their entrance to properly dispose of them, others find and stop illegal logging, or they organize eco-lessons and charity events at their schools, universities or other public institutions. All these people are united by a sense of responsibility for the well-being of nature and a desire to preserve it.

It is important to highlight that the language of ecological activism can be different, varying from extremely radical ideas, actions, slogans, banners and mottoes to more tolerant promotion of eco-friendly ideology in the form of the so-called “environmental diplomacy” [2]. But its target point is the only one and it is the environmental protection of a particular place of living.

The language of environmental activism in modern Russia, China and Southeast Asian countries has both their similarities and differences. On the one hand, a particular flash of interest towards the protection of the environment goes back to the end of the 20th century when The United Nations began discussing ecological problems within the framework of the first Earth Summit on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, known as Agenda 21. Later on, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (2007–2016) pronounced a rather decisive statement by saying that: “We don’t have plan B because there is no planet B.”<sup>2</sup> This utterance played the role of the incentive in the further development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This global environmental agenda made an impact on the ecological activism in the emerging countries like Russia, China as well as other Southeast Asian states, for example, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, etc.

Environmental activism has a rich history of environmental philosophy and science in these countries. For example, it appeared in the Soviet period of the present-day Russian Federation. A special slogan emerged in Russia that claimed that environmental activists would protect nature together with the people (“We will protect nature together with the people!”) [2]. Over the past 20 years, Russian eco-activists have gained knowledge and practical experience to participate in various forms of environmental protection: state and public hearings, public examination, litigation, organizing rallies, protests, single pickets, developing social technologies for promoting environmental requirements in the political arena [Ibid.].

It is also evident that activists and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) have contributed successfully to the rise of public environmental awareness in Southeast Asian societies [3].

China’s rapid industrial development over the past quarter of a century has resulted in heavy pollution and environmental degradation. The truth is twenty of

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Secretary-General. *Secretary-General’s remarks to the press at COP22*. 15 November 2016. Available from: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2016-11-15/un-secretary-generals-remarks-cop22-press-conference> (accessed: 11.02.2021).

the thirty most polluted cities in the world are located in the People’s Republic of China. One of the primary concerns for the Chinese people is pollution: the safety of the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat. Even the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself admits that the country is not only in charge of high levels of pollution, but also suffers significantly from it. The costs of public health and the inability of the government to turn the environmental situation around are raising social discontent. In recent years, environmental organizations have begun to emerge in China, and in some cases have had remarkable success in affecting policies that would have had significant adverse impacts on the environment.

In Japan, environmental activism emerged vigorously in 2011 after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Earlier the Japanese government had preferred a “soft” and gradual approach towards their ecological policy [4].

In South Korea, ecological campaigns have been an integral part of the democratic transition since the 1980s. Most of the first generation of environmental activists were university students. Nowadays South Korean eco-friendly campaign tactics include environmental symbolic acts to trigger a dramatic public reaction and push for policy change (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Young eco-activists outside Samsung’s Seoul HQ in August 2020, protesting against the controversial Vung Ang 2 coal power plant in Vietnam

Source: [www.chinadialogue.net](http://www.chinadialogue.net)

In Singapore environmental activism is also mostly represented by the local youth’s drive and inspiration to raise awareness about the climate crisis or hyper-consumerism. Young people, who have a formal education in environmental science, hope to make an impact on environmental education. Besides, they hope that people recognize that tackling the climate crisis requires a collective effort

and they can influence others by raising awareness on social media or changing their daily habits to be more sustainable.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, Southeast Asia is a region in constant political and social flux. It is home to myriad forms of social activism, including eco-friendly pro-environmental movements [5]. All these events targeting at protecting the local and global environment and trying to build a more sustainable world are being actively covered in the media discourse space and the global English language media discourse framework. Such a “lingua mundi” approach allows promoting sustainable ideology in the world and emerging countries, in particular, and unifying the environmental policy of the developing countries in their intention to become much greener nations.

***English language media as an influencer of the eco-friendly policy in emerging countries.*** As we have already stated, present-day Russia, China and other Southeast Asian countries all have their media to broadcast local, regional and international news. The feature that unites the media platforms of these countries is the presence of the English-language media resources in each of the above-mentioned regions of the planet.

English is spoken by hundreds of millions of people worldwide and it is the world’s favourite lingua franca – the language people are most likely to turn to when they don’t share a first language.<sup>4</sup>

Research findings suggest that there are no immediate competitors to English as present on the horizon [6]. This indicates that English will continue to dominate international communication and the media in the foreseeable future and become the language of global communication for users to meet their needs [7; 8].

The media platforms represented in the English language can be characterized as “digital town squares” (the term of Bill Gates) where people of different nationalities, races and religions can get together and speculate about various urgent problems, including environmental issues and sustainable development.

“Globish” English is a mediator of promotion of important social issues which people have to deal with today. Breakthrough inventions, ideologies and philosophies first appear in the English media discourse and then “spread like fire” across media discourses represented in other languages. The English media discourse space is a dynamic force which plays an important role in the interaction between cultures as well as between thought systems and the world [9].

The language of environmental activism and eco-friendly policy in Russia, China and other Southeast Asian countries has adopted a lot of constructive ecological ideas from the media discourse space of the English-speaking world today. For example, the green principle of 3R economy (*Reduce, Reuse, Recycle*) which is being implemented not only in the developed countries of Western Europe and North America but also in the rest of the world, i.e., in the countries with emerging economies.

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<sup>3</sup> Lee L. Youth in action: environmental activist raises climate issues on doodle at a time. *Today*. 20th December 2020. Available from: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/youth-action-environmental-activist-raise-climate-issues-one-doodle-time> (accessed: 25.01.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Lustig R. Can English remain the ‘world’s favourite’ language? *BBC*. 23rd May 2018. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44200901> (accessed: 20.01.2021).

Green metrics of academic institutions, clothes and food recycling policy, climate change debates and other key ecological issues have become a part of environmental activism introduced in the media discourse space of Russia and Southeast Asian countries daily. We are going to present the results of the research which will help to understand the main ways the English language media discourse may affect collective eco-consciousness and behaviour of developing countries in their search for a more secure future.

### Methods and results

This research represents the findings of the data analysis conducted on linguistic and extra-linguistic levels of the present-day English language media discourse circulated in the emerging countries of Russia, China and Southeast Asia. The following media editions which helped to estimate and measure the language of environmental activism were used: The Moscow Times, Russia Today (English version), Tass – Russian News Agency (Russian Federation); China Daily, Beijing Today, The Shanghai Herald, China Dialogue (China); The Japan Times (Japan); Today (Singapore); The Jakarta Post (Indonesia); The Korea Times (South Korea); The Bangkok Post (Thailand), etc. We selected 200 media texts related to the problem of environmental activism and sustainable development in the above-mentioned media discourses and conducted quantitative and qualitative content-analyses or “text mining” by using a special computer program QDA Minor.

The results of the analysis showed the following features of the environmental activism presented in the English language media discourses of Russia, China and Southeast Asia (Table).

**Key concepts which define environmental activism issues in emerging countries**

No.	Country	Environmental activism
1	Russia	Climate change, local climate change, pollution, air quality, protracted drought, reemerging deadly viruses (e.g. anthrax); the dangers of a rapidly warming world; decarbonization and demethanization; permafrost thawing, etc.
2	China	Emissions of carbon dioxide, endangered species; China as an “eco-civilization”; green cities; slowing global warming
3	South Korea	Pollution, landfill sites, waste collection, climate change, responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging and materials, etc.
4	Singapore	Climate crisis, green goals, education on climate change, the Green Plan, electric vehicle targets
5	Thailand	Water conservation, floods, smart city, food donation, recycled plastic, sustainable business policy, circular economy, etc.
6	Japan	Throwaway society, climate crisis, extreme weather, single-use plastic waste, a “reuse and refill” business model, water policy “Refill Japan”, decarbonization, hydrogen energy, etc.
7	Indonesia	Skyscrapers of waste, poor waste management, environmental and health disturbances, etc.

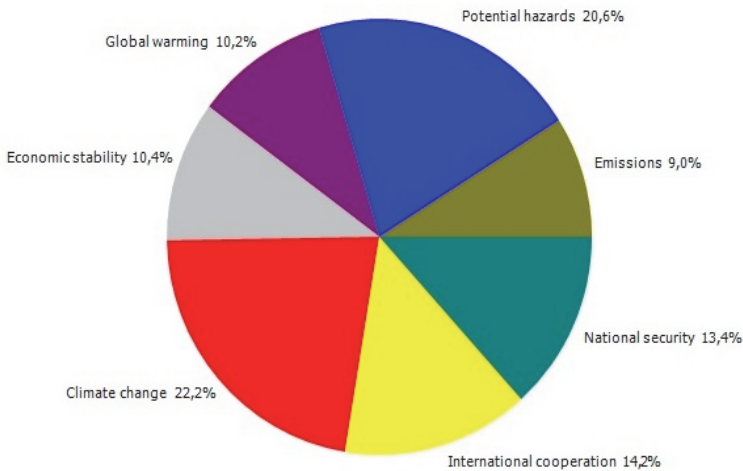
As it can be seen in Table, the most essential concepts of environmental activism in the English language media discourse of Russia, China and Southeast Asia are climate change, zero waste lifestyle, methane and carbon dioxide emission ceilings, energy policies, the ban of fossil fuels, electric vehicle targets, decarbonization and demethanization, etc.

The data presented above demonstrates and confirms the presence of almost the same environmental problems in emerging countries. In a certain way, the English language media discourse helps to unite their ecological policy. The environmental language sounds almost similar in each of these countries, although there are differences which can be explained by geographical, political and economic factors of the regions these states are located.

In modern Russia and China, for example, one may pay particular attention to the intention of national governments to find some balance between developing the sustainable policy of the country and maintaining environmental activism and protecting the state interests at the same time.

The English language media often criticize Russian authorities for their lack of desire to promote pronounced campaigns of decarbonization and demethanization in the country. “On the global scene, Moscow sees attempts to link climate change with security issues *as a threat to its security and economic stability*, unsurprisingly”.<sup>5</sup> This information is proved by the statistical data presented in Figure 2. One can see that the Russian authorities are trying to find the compromise between their response to the climate change activities (22%) and the potential hazards (20,6%) these “green innovations” may bring into the traditional system of the country’s legal ecological regulations.

**Moscow's dilemma**



**Figure 2.** The English-language media perception of the Russian government’s interest in environmental activism in Russia, % (based on the information presented in the English-language media discourse)

The same trend can be observed in China. The language of environmental activism is carefully managed by the Communist Party. Sometimes “talking about climate change can just be awkward. Chinese culture *considers it taboo* to discuss

<sup>5</sup> Lazard O. Moscow’s climate change dilemma. *The Moscow Times*. 10th February 2020. Available from: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/10/moscows-climate-change-dilemma-a72885> (accessed: 11.02.2021).



impending disasters when there are no easy solutions.” Moreover, “China’s propaganda in recent years keeps telling people to be wary of the infiltration of so-called foreign thoughts and influences”.<sup>6</sup> It means that the Chinese authorities watchdog the spread of environmental ideologies in the English language media discourse and try “to convince people that China needs development instead of protests or expressions of different opinions”.<sup>7</sup>

Some Chinese environmental activists use metaphorical expressions and believe that “*it feels like a dead end*,” because “more people are showing a willingness to participate in activities to reduce waste”<sup>8</sup> and build a more sustainable future in the country.

At the same time in neighbouring countries like South Korea, Japan, Thailand and the Republic of Singapore national governments are more loyal to the information content of the English language media discourse dedicated to ecological problems and also support local businesses and citizens in keeping a sustainable lifestyle.

For example, for consumers who want to participate in the zero-waste programs, several eco-friendly shopping centres help reduce waste by selling *plastic-free* items.

South Korean “Almaeng Market which opened last June in Seoul’s Mapo District, sells cosmetics, shampoo, detergent, coffee beans and various kinds of grain *without containers*. Visitors are asked to put the amount they need into reusable containers that they bring, and pay for the products per gram (Figure 3). Almaeng means ‘substance’ in Korean”.<sup>9</sup>

One more inspirational English language slogan which tries to persuade Japanese people to take care of their environment is the imperative “*Refill Japan*.” “...a platform called ‘Refill Japan’, which maps places where people can drink water or fill up their water bottles for free, including cafes and restaurants. Refill Japan is also involved in improving *existing water fountains* and installing new ones around the country...”<sup>10</sup>

Figure 3 demonstrates that all the motivational slogans and announcements are written in English as the language of international communication and environmental activism.

Overall, the analysis of the English language media discourses in Japan proves that environmental activism is helping to develop a new mindset in this country. Probably, the key concept of modern Japan is *sustainability* as “Japanese people don’t like letting things go to waste... and there is a chance that a *particularly Japanese sense of sustainability* will emerge.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> China teaches children its own version of the climate change story. *Japan Times*. 11th February 2021. Available from: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/02/11/asia-pacific/china-children-climate-change/> (accessed: 11.02.2021).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ji-hye J. Zero-waste lifestyle draws attention during pandemic. *The Korean Times*. 2nd February 2021. Available from: [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/02/371\\_303327.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/02/371_303327.html) (accessed: 11.02.2021).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mckirdy A. Throwaway society: rejecting a life consumed by plastic. *Japan Times*. Available from: <https://features.japantimes.co.jp/climate-crisis-plastic/> (accessed: 09.02.2021).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

The same environmental policy can be observed in Singapore and Indonesia, the countries which are promoting the idea of the Green Plan for their future national development and gradual elimination of environmental and health disturbances.



**Figure 3.** The English language “refill station” of a cosmetic Korean brand “Amorepacific” as an example of environmental activism in South Korea, presented by the English language media in the country<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, most states of Southeast Asia begin to adopt the idea promoted in the English language media discourse which regards humans as “*a truly dangerous species, who are alive because of the Earth and, if something happens to it, people won’t be able to survive.*”<sup>13</sup> The ideology of the present-day environmental activism says that “the Earth does not exist for our convenience. And if we act selfishly, it will break down.”<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

Everyone knows a story of the Tower of Babel when people were able to speak a single language and were trying to build a city and a tower tall enough to reach heaven. However, God confounded people’s speech and they could no longer understand each other. Finally, they scattered around the world. In our opinion,

<sup>12</sup> Ji-hye J. Zero-waste lifestyle draws attention during pandemic. *The Korean Times*. 2nd February 2021. Available from: [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/02/371\\_303327.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/02/371_303327.html) (accessed: 11.02.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Ito M. Japan 2030: tackling climate issues is key to the next decade. *Japan Times*. Available from: <https://features.japantimes.co.jp/climate-crisis-2030/> (accessed: 10.02.2021).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

this myth proves the importance of the existence of one language on the planet which can unite peoples in achieving their common goals. In the modern era, English has become such “a dynamic force which plays an important role in the interaction between cultures as well as between thought systems and the world” [9]. The English language media discourse space has turned into an influential mediator and instrument of solving global concerns of the humanity including sustainable development policy and the promotion of environmental activism. Nowadays it seems almost impossible to escape the influence of the English language media which are present in almost every country of the world and the overwhelming majority of the world’s population are exposed to the English language media discourse space daily via the English language press, social media, brand names, ads and commercials, through subtitled anglophone TV, film and DVD productions, lyrics and titles of all kinds.

Thus, directly or indirectly the English language media discourse is making an impact on the evolution of people’s eco-consciousness in the emerging countries like Russia, China and other states of Southeast Asia by promoting “green” ideology of environmental activism there. Even though each of these developing countries has its own national and multinational interests in the region and on the world stage, the language of environmental activism implemented on linguistic and non-linguistic levels in the English language media discourse of the above-mentioned countries, affect their local cultures, people, national languages and mentality. One can observe growing inspiration and motivation of national leaders, authorities and common population to build an eco-civilization as a gesture of resistance to environmental degradation and as a sense of cultural and national continuity as well as a part of the solution for the planet’s sustainable future.

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