



<https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-36732>

EDN: ZSRRIV

Research article / Научная статья

More than just a tree: Ecolinguistics and responses to the felling of ‘Hadrian’s tree’

Douglas Mark PONTON  

University of Catania, Catania, Italy

 dmponton@gmail.com

Abstract

In the current climate ecolinguistic research has arguably never been more important, as its basic premises regard the survival of life on Earth and key philosophical questions hitherto under-acknowledged by mainstream science. In recent decades, environmental thinking has made great advances in shaping current opinions towards nature and the non-human world. The goal of this paper is to explore certain currents of mediated thinking in modern Britain regarding nature, in order to assess how far expressions of sorrow for the felling of a prominent tree might correspond to a genuine ecological sentiment. The study explores public responses to an apparent case of eco-vandalism, the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree in September 2023 in Northumberland, using data taken from social media and other online sources such as e-newspapers. From the point of view of Ecolinguistic theory and that of Positive Discourse Analysis it applies critical lenses such as Evaluation and Discourse Pragmatics to dig beneath the surface of texts produced on the topic, in order to explore diverse current attitudes to trees in the UK. The paper finds that, though there are instances in which people appear to express grief for the loss of the Sycamore Gap tree, it is possible to account for these in ways that lessen the likelihood that they are motivated by purely ecological sentiment. In practice human attitudes towards trees tend to be superficial and instrumental, and this tendency is also found here. The Sycamore Gap event brings many latent social attitudes into play, and this paper thus contributes to the developing field of Ecolinguistics by focusing on tree-centred narratives, distinguishing between inherent ideologies of pseudo- and authentic environmental sensitivity.

Keywords: *ecolinguistics, ecological discourse, mourning, environmental sensitivity, environmentalism*

For citation:

Ponton, Douglas M. 2023. *More than just a tree: Ecolinguistics and responses to the felling of ‘Hadrian’s tree’*. *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 27 (3). 797–819. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-36732>

© Douglas M. Ponton, 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

Больше, чем просто дерево: эколингвистика и реакция на вырубку «дерева Адриана»

Дуглас М. ПОНТОН  

Катанийский университет, Катания, Италия

 dmponton@gmail.com

Аннотация

Современная климатическая ситуация в мире обуславливает особую значимость эколингвистических исследований, поскольку их основные положения касаются сохранения жизни на Земле и ключевых философских вопросов, до сих пор недостаточно признаваемых официальной наукой. В последние десятилетия экологическое мышление оказывает существенное влияние на формирование взглядов на природу. Цель данной статьи – рассмотреть научные подходы к опосредованному осмыслению природы в современной Великобритании и определить, насколько скорбь по поводу вырубки одного реликтового дерева может соответствовать подлинным экологическим чувствам. В исследовании изучается реакция общественности на получивший широкую огласку случай эковандализма — вырубку в сентябре 2023 г. в Нортумберленде т.н. «платана Гэп», или «дерева Адриана». Материал был взят из социальных сетей и других онлайн-источников, в частности электронных газет. Нарративы исследовались с позиций эколингвистики и позитивного дискурс-анализа с применением критических подходов теории оценки и дискурс-прагматики для выявления заложенной в них скрытой информации и определения различных отношений к деревьям в современной Великобритании. Полученные данные продемонстрировали, что, хотя в ряде случаев люди выражают скорбь по поводу утраты «платана Гэп», есть основания предполагать, что ими движут не только экологические чувства. На практике отношение человека к деревьям часто является поверхностным и инструментальным. Анализ данного случая эковандализма и реакций на него выявил ряд скрытых социальных факторов, а также установил различия между псевдо- и подлинной экологической чувствительностью, что вносит вклад в развитие эколингвистики.

Ключевые слова: *эколингвистика, экологический дискурс, экологическая чувствительность, скорбь, экологизм*

Для цитирования:

Ponton D.M. *More than just a tree: Ecolinguistics and responses to the felling of ‘Hadrian’s tree’*. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*. 2023. V. 27. № 4. P. 797–819. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-36732>

1. Introduction

In the current climate Ecolinguistic research (Fill & Mühlhäusler 2001, Fill & Penz 2018) has arguably never been more important, as its basic premises regard the survival of life on Earth and key philosophical questions hitherto under-acknowledged by mainstream science. Moreover, thanks to the affordances of the worldwide web, public access to debate on such issues has never been easier, and sites like Facebook*, Instagram*, TikTok, etc., permit users to engage with each

* Компания Meta Platforms, которой принадлежат данные ресурсы признана экстремистской организацией и запрещена на территории РФ.

other and contribute to the shaping of a range of discourses and social practices. They also contribute to what has been called the ‘emotionalisation of public discourse’ (Zappettini et al. 2021), as posters frequently attempt to boost their profiles through hyperbolic expressions and performative emotive manifestations. Ecolinguistic discourse is no exception. The present study was prompted by the extraordinary outpouring of public feeling concerning the demise of the Sycamore Gap tree, on Hadrian’s Wall in the north of Britain, which was felled during the night of 28th September 2023 by an anonymous vandal. Public response to the outrage featured expressions of grief, anger and bewilderment, and probably exceeded any previous demonstration of public feeling at the loss of an individual tree. From an Ecolinguistic perspective this evidence that people care so deeply about a tree could be taken in a positive sense, as a suggestion perhaps that decades of green activism have left a mark on public consciousness. Yet viewed more closely, the special features of this particular tree complicate the question. It stood alone by the historic Roman wall in a curvaceous dip between two hills, and lent itself to a thousand evocative reproductions for calendars and the like. It was highly photogenic, and had even featured in a 1991 Hollywood movie, Kevin Costner’s *Prince of Thieves*. Discourse concerning the tree’s demise frequently evokes notions of ‘heritage’, as in this comment reported in a Guardian article with the significant title of ‘More than just a tree’:

Sycamore Gap is a Northumberland symbol, more than a piece of landscape, more than just a tree; it’s as instantly recognisable as the Palace of Westminster or the Liver Building¹

This speaker recontextualises or reframes the tree, moving it from its appropriate site within the vegetable universe to the realm of photogenic heritage buildings. Its loss is akin, from this perspective, to that of a landmark like Big Ben – the semiotic, not the natural, landscape has been affected. Another way of putting this would be to say that the speaker does not miss the tree as a living, feeling, non-human essence with its own unknowable conscious processes; indeed, his general attitude to trees could be seen as something closer to contempt (‘more than *just* a tree’). Because of the contingent features of its particular history, especially those linked to its unique location, this tree acquired the significance of other marketable human artefacts, and meanings that have little to do with Ecology. The Economic Times, for example, highlights the tree’s role in promoting tourism:

It was a place where countless couples found romance, making it a popular spot for marriage proposals. Its unique location and striking appearance had made it one of the most-photographed landscapes in Britain, attracting tourists from around the world to Hadrian’s Wall and the Northumberland National Park.²

¹ Guardian. Online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/29/more-than-just-a-tree-recollections-of-northumberlands-sycamore-gap>, retrieved 12 Oct. 23.

² The Economic Times. Online at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/us/what-was-the-sycamore-gap-trees-significance-know-its-history-as-police-arrests-2-over-its-destruction-in-england/articleshow/104074179.cms?from=mdr>, retrieved 12 Oct. 23.

Thus, the tree was a contributor to tourism, currently one of Britain's most significant industries. It is from this perspective, then, that this study asks how far the expressions of grief for this natural, growing, non-human object may correspond to the authentic feeling that would be provoked by the loss of a dear one in the human world. Another way of looking at this would be to say that only true feelings of grief, for the tree itself, could be viewed as a touchstone for the existence of ecological sensibility. To the extent that a sentimental regard for the tree as having value in other contexts (for example, as a factor in promoting tourism) is the mainspring of the emotional outpour, the ecological significance would be correspondingly diminished.

The goal of the study is to sift certain currents of mediated thinking in modern Britain towards the natural world, in order to assess how far what has been called an 'outpouring of grief' over the felling of a prominent tree might correspond to a genuine ecological sentiment. It aims to answer the question whether British people do indeed have strong feelings about trees, and whether sentiments that correspond to what Ecolinguists would refer to as 'deep ecology' might underlie the expressions of grief provoked by the Sycamore Gap episode.

2. Background: Grieving for trees

The notion that trees can occupy a place of sufficient importance in human psychic space to provoke grief at their removal is not unknown in literature as the example of J. R. R. Tolkien shows, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, one of the most successful novels of the last century, and a landmark of cinema in this. For him trees were not 'just' trees but were endowed with perceptions, thoughts, feelings and in some cases even ambulation. As he wrote, in a letter to the Daily Telegraph:

Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves.³

He continues in a vein most relevant to the current paper, indicating that in his view trees are akin to animals and humans since they can be 'tortured' and even 'murdered':

but nothing it [the Forestry Commission] has done that is stupid compares with the destruction, torture and murder of trees perpetrated by private individuals and minor official bodies. The savage sound of the electric saw is never silent wherever trees are still found growing.

Ecolinguistic and Ecostylistic studies have explored the representation of nature in poetry, highlighting the way some poets respond to nature in ways suggestive of deeper relations with the natural world, including trees (Stibbe 2007, Goatly 2022). Goatly (2017: 62), for example, shows how the lexical choices of Edward Thomas construe kinship with trees:

³ Tolkien and trees. Online at: <https://www.rootssimple.com/2016/09/tolkien-and-trees/>, retrieved 31.10.2023.

And trees and us — imperfect friends, we men
And trees since time began; and nevertheless
Between us still we breed a mystery.

Lucille Clifton's 1990 poem, '*The Killing of the Trees*'⁴ describes an 'old oak' uprooted and felled by a bulldozer, comparing the attack to that of Custer on native Americans at Wounded Knee. The grief at the event is not represented as located in the poet herself, but rather in the trees themselves: 'trees huddle in a camp weeping/ outside my window'. In a better-known modern American poem, Maya Angelou's *When Great Trees Fall*, it is possible to understand the poem as not about trees at all, but rather about the death of 'great souls', for whose passing the death of great trees is an extended metaphor.

By contrast the British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose work often features a passionate observation of the natural world, appears to feel something like grief for the trees themselves, in his poem *Binsey Poplars* (1879):

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled;
Of a fresh and following folded rank
Not spared, not one
That dandled a sandalled
Shadow that swam or sank
On meadow and river and wind-wandering weed-winding bank

Likewise nature poet John Clare's attention in his long poem '*To a Fallen Elm*' (1830), though it becomes a political reflection on the nature of human liberty, is mainly motivated by his feelings of loss for the 'Old Elm that murmured in our chimney top. The sweetest anthem autumn ever made.' In their different ways, these writers express feelings of affection for the trees, and sadness that provoke sadness and even grief at their loss or destruction. By contrast with some of the responses already quoted to the loss of Hadrian's tree, it is noticeable that there is no reference to the trees' relevance on some other scale of values – as symbols for tourists, for example. Hopkins simply misses the trees he passed on his daily walks and had come to love, very much as living beings that shared his bio-space, to whose beauty and freshness he was particularly sensitive.

3. Ecolinguistics: Literature review

The now vibrant research trend of Ecolinguistics arguably originated in a 1992 paper by M. A. K. Halliday in which he presents a wide-ranging critique of the role of language and its relationship with the environment:

⁴ Poetry for the Anthropocene. Online at: <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/engl205-07h-fall-2017/panel-2-person-2>, retrieved 31.10.2023.

There is a syndrome of grammatical features which conspire – in Martin's term – to construe reality in a certain way; and it is a way that is no longer good for our health as a species. (Halliday 2010: 164)

Like critical discourse analysis it is partly a socially constructive paradigm, regarding language as key in shaping both discourses and social practices in the area of our relationship with what has been called the 'more than human world'. It also reaches out, in the tradition of positive discourse analysis (Martin 2004), in search of more beneficial environmental discourses, embracing insights from the arts, from ecology, ecosophy, anthropology, primitive cultures and the like (Gottlieb 2008, Stibbe 2015, Dryzek 2022, Virdis 2022). The aim is both to raise awareness on the current tragic situation that results from our unreflecting exploitation of what we habitually regard as 'natural resources', and to learn from more holistic and eco-sensitive approaches that prevail in such domains.

Trees and forests are fundamental in the discourse of 'green' movements, and become significant players in clashes between interests of local communities and organised capitalism, as was the case with the Chipko movement in India in the 1970s, which pitted local interests against mass deforestation (Haynes 2002). In our own time, the Amazon rainforest appears frequently in international discourse because of its perceived role in mitigating climate change (Siikamaki et al. 2019), while large-scale tree-planting as carbon sinks to offset toxic emissions has been an influential feature of Green environmentalism since the 1992 Kyoto protocol (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2006).

In the deep ecological perspective that imbues much Ecolinguistic research (see, e.g. Devall & Sessions 1985, Naess 1987, 2005, 2008, 2009, Kohn 2013), trees have great significance because they occupy a key role in sustaining so many vital parts of the biosphere. In attempting to recover a perception that has largely been backgrounded in first world countries, Ecolinguistics has reached out to indigenous traditions that still preserve ecological practices and holistic ecosophies, reflective of a more intimate connection with nature. As Indian environmentalist Sunderlal Bahugana says, 'We have to feel the heartbeats of the trees, because trees are living beings like us' (in Suzuki et al. 2008: 187). Meanwhile Tim Ingold (2000: 145) says of the Malay rainforest people the Batek: 'for the Batek, trees are people. They possess agency and sociality.' This and similar ways of thinking about trees will likely be viewed by many in the first world as at best fanciful notions, probably associated with minorities such as tree huggers who are stigmatised as eccentrics by mainstream thought (Shirania et al. 2015). Alternatively, such perspectives may be felt to typify imaginative or literary representations of trees. Talking, walking or otherwise animated trees are familiar figures in popular culture (e.g. J. K. Rowling's 'whomping willow', while many works of fiction or non-fiction document personal ecosophies, and highlight the authors' sensitivity to the regenerative potentialities of contact with trees (see, e.g. Kimmerer 2013, Powers 2018, Shafak 2021).

In his provocative book *‘How Forests Think’* (2013), Kohn recognises that to give serious attention to the book’s claim would entail a revision of anthropocentric understandings of our place in the natural world:

Forests think. What are the implications of this claim for our understandings of what it means to be human in a world that extends beyond us? (Kohn 2013: 21–22)

The notion that trees might communicate and enjoy other aspects of conscious life has received scientific attention in recent years. For example, Wohlleben (2016) speaks of ‘the language of trees’ and describes their communication through the air and by means of fungal networks, via ‘olfactory, visual, and electrical signals’. Research in mainstream biological science has also highlighted the sophisticated systems developed by plants to exchange information with other plants (see, e.g. Trewavas 2014, Karban 2015, Davies 2015, Ryan et al. 2021). Yet such scientific research may take care to distance itself from the kind of environmental thinking that breezily attributes sophisticated human features like ‘soul’, ‘consciousness’, ‘feelings’, etc. to plants and trees. Karban (ibid: 3), for example, appears to dismiss as ‘absurd’ the notion that plants might ‘appreciate’ music, insisting on the need for empirical evidence; he also takes great care to define what is meant by ‘communication’, distinguishing what occurs in the plant context from the everyday human kind.

Ecolinguistic research on the topic has taken a variety of approaches. From a critical ecolinguistic perspective, authors have pointed out that trees may be reductively represented in terms of their marketability as ‘lumber’ (Chawla 2001: 120), the same perspective from which Stibbe (2015: 157) surveys the characterisation of forests as ‘stocks of natural capital’. Applying the methods of Corpus Analysis to Ecolinguistics, Poole and Micalay-Hurtado (2022) report a diachronic study that shows how previous associations of forests and trees with ‘wildness’ and ‘boundless’, ‘limitless’ space have now given way to discourses of human dominion. Some studies in Ecolinguistics have focused on terminological critique: for example, Schultz (2001: 110) argues that the practise of representing natural features such as forests as ‘resources’ is exploitative. She provides a list of conventional ways of referring to trees that highlight their potential as sources of wood next to more ecological alternatives (e.g. production forest/*forest used for industrial forestry*; softwood/*conifer, pine*; timbered/*forested*, etc.) (Schultz, ibid: 114).

In general then, the perspective of Ecolinguistics towards plants, trees, forests, is that of deep ecology, as Stibbe (2014: 5) puts it:

Deep ecology is based around recognising the intrinsic worth of plants, animals, forests and rivers, that is, their value beyond direct, short-term use for humans.

This formula cannot easily be represented as idealistic green whimsy, a common response to ecological thinking in the cultural mainstream. It stops short

of exaggerated, unproven hypotheses regarding plant consciousness for example, simply arguing that they have a value and an ‘intrinsic worth’ that has nothing whatever to do with their usefulness for humans.

4. Data and methodology

The paper analyses reporting of stories of the felling of Hadrian’s Tree from a narrative perspective, taking data from a variety of media and social media sources. Data is taken from online newspapers like the Guardian, one of the few major UK dailies not to paywall its texts, and from Facebook*, using stories obtained from the search prompt ‘Sycamore Gap tree’. Three of these stories have been analysed using the methodology outlined.

As Allan Bell (2005: 397) says, ‘Journalists do not write articles. They write stories.’ Polkinghorne (1988: 11) calls narrative ‘the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful’. By focusing on narrative in discourse, this paper follows a path outlined by Stibbe (2015), who sees stories as fundamental components of social construction. In the same way that Lakoff and Johnson suggest that we ‘live by’ metaphors, Stibbe argues that we live by stories – western societies, for example, live by stories expressive of neo-liberal consumerist ideologies such as GROWTH IS GOOD, MORE IS BETTER, A GOOD JOB IS ONE THAT PAYS WELL, and so on. Of course, these ‘stories’ are environmentally harmful because they feed a capitalist-industrial logic of production and consumption that has little or no regard for holistic or deep ecological principles.

Labov (1972: 227) outlined a model that is still relevant for narrative analysis,⁵ which proposed the following stages (summarised in Hall 2005: 397–8):

1. The *abstract* summarizes the central action and main point of the narrative. A storyteller uses it at the outset to pre-empt the questions, what is this about, why is this story being told?
2. The *orientation* sets the scene; the who, when, where, and initial situation or activity of the story.
3. The *complicating action* is the central part of the story proper answering the question, what happened then?
4. The *evaluation* addresses the question, so what? A directionless sequence of clauses is not a narrative. Narrative has point, and it is narrators’ prime intention to justify the value of the story they are telling, to demonstrate why these events are reportable.
5. The *resolution* is what finally happened to conclude the sequence of events.
6. Finally, many narratives end with a *coda* – ‘and that was that.’ This wraps up the action, and returns the conversation from the time of the narrative to the present.’

⁵ Bell (ibid: 399), for example, uses Labov’s model in much the same way as I do in this paper. See also Ponton (forthcoming).

To exemplify this model, consider a story taken from the Guardian newspaper concerning the UK's preparedness for future storms.⁶ The *abstract*, in this case, coincides with the headline and the sub-header:

UK ill-prepared for havoc future storms could wreak, scientists warn

Government not putting enough effort into flood resilience despite likelihood of more frequent and severe storms, experts say

The *orientation*, which naturally features in the early part of the story, presents key actors such as those found in the text just quoted – scientists, government, experts. It gives information that allows readers to contextualise the story relating to where it's happening and what's going on:

- Experts believe
- Storms more frequent and severe in the UK
- Caused thousands of homes in the UK to flood
- Almost 150,000 households in the UK were left without power
- Schools in Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney had to shut

Stories have one or more *complicating action* that make significant contributions to the story's consequentiality, to provide readers with a reason to take an interest. Here we find:

The flood prevention approach has been to build large, hard structures to protect infrastructure, but Hoey said this was expensive and had major drawbacks.

Hunston and Thompson (2003: 5) describe the next component, evaluation, as a way of expressing the speaker or writer's 'attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about'. For Labov evaluation is crucial since it shows listeners how they are to understand the story, to answer a hypothetical listener's imagined 'so what?' Like the other stages, evaluation is not confined to a particular point in the text but may occur at any moment or be sprinkled throughout. For example, in the storms story it is already at work in the sub-text:

The UK is ill-prepared for the disaster future storms could wreak, scientists have warned

Here we find evaluation of the UK via the adjective 'ill-prepared', while a hypothetical future event is premediated (Grusin 2004) as a 'disaster', the negative overtones further underlined by the notion of 'warning' from scientists, socially valued as authoritative figures. Via such semantic means the writer signals the importance of the story, that readers need to pay attention if they want to stay safe in future. As for the result stage, this story proposes two alternatives, unlike many

⁶ Guardian online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/07/uk-ill-prepared-for-havoc-future-storms-could-wreak-scientists-warn>, retrieved 07/11/2023.

stories where this is a univocal feature (e.g. ‘*and they all lived happily ever after*’). Here the outcome depends on the action the UK government takes to deal with the threat of flood damage, and could be positive:

all those at risk of flooding are better protected and prepared for the future.

Or negative:

[..] could cost people their homes, livelihoods and even their lives.

There is no coda.

Wilson and Sperber’s *relevance theory* (Sperber & Wilson 1986, Wilson & Sperber 1994) theorizes implied meanings that underly texts and utterances, and where needed their approach is used with some of the data. In their view, ‘relevance, and the maximisation of relevance, is the key to human cognition’ (Wilson & Sperber 1994: 41), and the theory claims that communication involves a presumption of ‘optimal relevance’ (ibid: 96). For example, in the Guardian text we find:

A Defra spokesperson said: “We are investing a record £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal erosion schemes”

Readers will unpack this to mean something like: *If we are investing all this money then we should be safe from future floods*. This would be my hypothesis for the most ‘strongly salient’ implied meaning in this case. Other meanings, for example that: *this proves that the government is taking the problem seriously*, or *this shows how badly climate change is impacting our economy* would be seen as ‘weakly salient’ (Wilson & Sperber 1994: 99) and hence less likely to represent the writer’s intended meaning.

The study also considers discourse framing (Goffman 1974), a perspective that allows for consideration of the way narrative composition influences the transmission of meaning. In Entman’s well-known formula, this selection process has the effect of ‘promot[ing] a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman 1993: 52). This can be a largely unconscious process: for instance, in the first story dealt with in the next section, the poster is describing the Sycamore Gap tree in the context of family trips, picnics and so on. References are made to ‘mam’ and ‘dad’, and hence it is possible to see the operation of a ‘family’ frame at work in the story. The fallen tree (a ‘family’ tree?) is implicitly included as an honorary member of the poster’s family, and thus, in a pragmatic sense, the identification of the tree with the writer’s deceased father is strengthened. However, framing can also be deliberate, and this is more common with professionally produced discourse such as newspaper stories. For example, consider the way the Washington Post begins its account of the Sycamore Gap story:

On Thursday, the UK lost two national treasures. One was Michael Gambon, the actor who played Dumbledore in the Harry Potter movies, who died at 82 after a bout of pneumonia. The other was a tree.⁷

The coincidental death of a famous actor at the same time as the tragedy allows the writer to view the story through the lens of a ‘celebrity’ frame, whose meanings underlie textual elements such as:

the sycamore was likely *one of the most photographed* natural landmarks in the UK, if not the world. It even had *a starring role* in the 1991 movie *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*

While such a frame serves the purpose of giving internal coherence to the text, it also suggests a range of pragmatic meanings that range from strongly to weakly salient. For example, my hypothesis for the former would be that: *since this is such a famous tree, this is an important story and readers should care about it*. A less strongly salient meaning would be that *it is only because this tree is so famous that we should care about it at all*.

5. Analysis: Stories about the tree

Social media has been called ‘perhaps the largest scale collective communicative phenomena in human history’ (Blommaert & Varis 2015), and as an echo chamber of public opinion a social media site like Facebook* has distinct advantages for the analyst over older methods of data collection (Wilson et al. 2012). One of its affordances is to allow for rapid gathering of a range of opinions in response to a public event of this type. Replies posted to a member’s question about what should be put in its place in the main express feelings of outrage, grief, etc., including: *A gibbet for the offenders; It's sad when any tree bites the dust; I hope the general public are informed as to punishment of perpetrators and names*. However, others resist this and try to see the funny side: *If you want a tree, plant it 30 years ago!*, or *How about a block of flats..ffs.;* *A Greggs, the only place left to open one*, etc. Others make ironic or indifferent comments: *Woodn't (sic) know it was just a tree..Millions around; Ffs it was only a tree!!*⁸

A possible pitfall with scanning a site like Facebook* as an index of an abstraction like ‘popular feeling’ is that its users are engaged in a range of pragmatic operations in which the sincere expression of personal emotion is not necessarily uppermost. Habitual users post on current stories as part of a daily routine: they comment on other members’ posts, use emojis or stickers to signal responses,

⁷ Washington Post. Online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/2023/09/29/sycamore-gap-hadrian-s-wall-tree-felling-is-a-parable/d5cbba36-5ebf-11ee-b961-94e18b27be28_story.html

⁸ Comments from the Northern Echo post, Facebook*. Online at: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=sycamore%20gap%20tree%20felled>, retrieved 9/11/23.

engage with other members, and these patterns can be seen as signals of belonging to the virtual community of ‘friends’. Discursive mechanisms of alignment are in operation, precisely those described by Martin (2004: 322–3), who says:

We’re positioned, through shared feeling, to belong to a group of people [...] who disapprove of behaviour of this kind [...] How does language negotiate feelings in order to make us belong?

This does not necessarily mean that users are expected to respond in the same way to an event; a range of posts are found, as we have just seen. ‘Belonging’ may be achieved simply by posting, and even flippant comments that go against the grain of the perceived consensus have a place in these imagined communities. It is noticeable that this type of comment is usually brief; a few words rather than a paragraph that outlines or argues a case. Longer posts tend to express feelings of sadness, typically in personal anecdotes like the following:

Table 1. Dad charity walk story⁹

1	We did our first charity walk for Brain Tumour Research after my beloved dad passed away. He
2	loved it up there, seemed right, nearly 70 of us walked that day, wonderful memories I will
3	never forget. My mam was 78 at the time, she said dad was with her while she walked. She
4	loved Sycamore Gap, we all stopped and took photographs. So sad it is gone but I know it will
5	grow stronger and every bit as magnificent as it was before

In this story mourning for the tree is superimposed over another narrative that mourns the poster’s father, so that feelings for both are mingled. In fact, it is hard to disentangle the two narratives, unless the two words ‘seemed right’ are allotted the inferential reading: ‘*since my father had always loved Sycamore Gap, it seemed right, following his death from a brain tumour, to arrange a charity walk there*’.¹⁰ If this is correct, then we can interpret: ‘My mam [...] said dad was with her while she walked’ (3–4) as meaning that the mother had a feeling of supernatural closeness to the departed. It is noticeable that evaluation refers to both these realms of feeling; for the tree and for the poster’s father:

The feelings of sadness for the tree (4–5) are matched by hope for its future (5–6). Unlike the writer’s father who is gone for ever, the inference is that another sycamore will soon flourish on the same spot. Perhaps, then, it is possible to infer that for this writer one sycamore is every bit as ‘magnificent’ as another, and that

⁹ Facebook*. Herding Hill Farm Touring site. Online at: <https://www.facebook.com/herdinghillfarm>, retrieved 12/11/2023.

¹⁰ Competing with this, and thus contributing to a sense of ambiguity in the text, would be something like: *my dad seemed in good health during the walk*. Though this is impossible, since we know that the dad has ‘passed away’ (1), in such a short, informal discourse type as a Facebook* post it would be possible for the narrative to have skipped to an earlier time frame, perhaps a short time before his death (my dad *had* seemed right, i.e., we hadn’t noticed symptoms of his illness). This interpretation makes sense of ‘dad was with her while she walked’ (3) which otherwise requires a supernatural explanation.

the sense of sadness we find in this tale derives from the circumstance that this tree grew in a place dear to the father’s memory.

Table 2. Dad charity walk, narrative structure

Abstract	–
Orientation	Who? Dad (1), mam (3), 70 of us (2) When? After my beloved dad passed away (1–2) What? A charity walk Where? Sycamore Gap (4)
Complication	So sad it is gone (4–5)
Evaluation	He loved it up there (2) Wonderful memories (2–3) She loved Sycamore Gap (4) So <u>sad</u> (4–5) <u>stronger</u> and <u>every bit as magnificent</u> as it was before (5–6)
Result	(The tree will grow) <i>stronger..etc.</i>
Coda	–

The next story is more formal; a newspaper report of the felling:

Table 3. Sycamore Gap tree story

1	Famous Sycamore Gap tree at Hadrian’s Wall found cut down
2	Police investigating after former tree of the year winner, estimated to be several hundred years
3	old, felled.
4	A police investigation has been launched into the felling of one of the most photographed trees
5	in the UK, the Sycamore Gap tree at Hadrian’s Wall, Northumberland, which was found cut
6	down on Thursday morning.
7	The world famous tree, voted English tree of the year in a Woodland Trust competition in 2016
8	and featured in the 1991 film Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, is thought to have been
9	deliberately felled.
10	Photographs taken on Thursday morning show it appears to have been sawed at the base of
11	the trunk with a chainsaw. The sycamore tree, estimated to be several hundred years old, had
12	previously stood in a small picturesque valley in Northumberland national park in the north of
13	England.
14	In a statement, Northumberland national park authority said it “can confirm that sadly, the
15	famous tree at Sycamore Gap has come down overnight. We have reason to believe
16	it has been deliberately felled. We are working with the relevant agencies and partners
17	with an interest in this iconic north-east landmark and will issue more details once they are
18	known.
19	“Sycamore Gap was voted English tree of the year in 2016 in the Woodland Trust’s awards and
20	is much-loved by people from across the world. Northumberland national park authority would
21	like to ask the public not to visit the site at this time whilst we work with our partners to identify
22	what has happened and to make the site safe.”
23	A Northumbria police spokesperson said: “We can confirm an investigation has been
24	launched following damage to the Sycamore Gap tree in Northumberland. “Inquiries are
25	ongoing to establish whether any criminal offences have been committed.”

Here the emphasis is factual rather than emotive. Two frames seem predominant, a sort of ‘celebrity’ frame and a ‘crime’ frame, as the narrative analysis makes plain:

Table 4. Sycamore Gap tree story: Narrative structure

Abstract	Famous Sycamore Gap tree at Hadrian’s Wall found cut down (1)
Orientation	Who? Police (2,4, 23–25) When? Thursday morning (6) What? Sycamore gap tree Where? Hadrian’s Wall (1,5), Northumberland (6,12,14,20,23,24)
Complication	Photographs taken on Thursday morning show it appears to have been sawed at the base of the trunk with a chainsaw (10–11)
Evaluation	Famous Sycamore Gap tree (1); world famous tree (7); the famous tree (15) one of the most photographed trees in the UK (4–5) sadly (14) this iconic north-east landmark (17) voted English tree of the year (19) much-loved (20)
Result	the famous tree at Sycamore Gap has come down overnight (15)
Coda	Inquiries are ongoing to establish whether any criminal offences have been committed (24–25)

The crime frame is construed by the opening sentence: Police investigating (2). This refers back to the Abstract which outlines the terrain the story will cover – a ‘famous tree’ has been ‘cut down’. This passive formula with agent deletion permits the inference that the identity of the perpetrator is the subject of the police investigation. By giving these meanings thematic preference (Halliday 1967) the writer establishes an interpretative lens that will govern the whole story, since analogous references occur at intervals throughout the text. The Complicating Action 10–11) refers to a criminal action, with hedging typical of the domains of criminal investigation and crime reporting: ‘appears to have been’ (10) strongly implies ‘has been’, but to assert the latter in the absence of a legal judgement would be problematic. The Coda stage, which sums up the story and returns the reader to the present, reiterates the police frame, via a journalistic crime cliché of ‘ongoing inquiries’ (24–25).

Evaluation, with several references to the tree’s ‘fame’, its awards, its global popularity (19) and so on, provides support for the notion that another main frame in the text is that of ‘celebrity’.

The two frames support one another, since it is manifest that it is precisely the tree’s visibility as an ‘iconic landmark’ (17) that renders the act of cutting it down a sort of crime. It is worth pausing over the meaning of the Coda:

Inquiries are ongoing to establish whether any criminal offences have been committed

This is the kind of matter-of-fact verbiage that is often found at the conclusion of a police story, typically some variation on ‘a man is reported to be helping the police with their enquiries’. Here, however, by the term ‘enquiries’ (sic), the report does not mean that police are busy searching for the guilty parties to bring them to justice. Rather, the most salient meaning – indeed, this is hardly an implicature, but rather a meaning that corresponds to the denotational meaning of the sentence in question – is that they aim to establish if it was a crime to cut down the tree at all! In other words, the story raises the question of whether trees have rights, whether talk of the tree being ‘murdered’ might have some legal foundation, or if statements like the following are simply hyperbole:

Hairy Biker Si King’s ‘beyond words’ message for whoever ‘murdered’ Sycamore Gap tree¹¹

The final story opens with a celebrity frame that was cited in the Methodology section above, but moves on to develop what could be called an ‘environmental’ frame, setting the tree’s destruction in a broader context of depletion of the UK’s green spaces.

Table 5. Beloved Sycamore Gap tree story

1	Beloved Sycamore Gap tree’s butchering offers broader lessons ¹²
2	Nature makes us feel good, so let’s preserve, protect and restore our living world
3	On September 28, the UK lost two national treasures. One was Michael Gambon, the actor who played Dumbledore in the Harry Potter movies, who died at 82 after a bout of pneumonia. The other was a tree.
4	
5	
6	The Sycamore Gap tree stood proudly in northeast England next to Hadrian’s Wall, an ancient boundary that once divided Roman Britannia and Caledonia. Framed beautifully by rising hillsides, the sycamore was likely one of the most photographed natural landmarks in the UK, if not the world. It even had a starring role in the 1991 movie Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves. But on the morning of September 28, the tree was found in two pieces. It had been felled overnight in what the police believe was a deliberate act of vandalism.
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	It has rightly been met with an outpouring of grief and anger. We have yet to find out who committed the act or why, though a 16-year-old boy was arrested. There are two things we should take away from the tragedy, though. The first is a reminder of nature’s importance in our lives. The second is a call to action: Nature’s decline in the country goes far beyond Sycamore Gap.
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	Reading the messages of those mourning the tree, it’s clear just how much it means to people. Some proposed to their partners there. Others scattered the ashes of their loved
18	
19	

¹¹ Wales Online. Online at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/hairy-biker-si-kings-beyond-27805806>, retrieved 13/11/2023.

¹² Gulf News. Opinion. Online at: <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/beloved-sycamore-gap-trees-butchering-offers-broader-lessons-1.98483211>, retrieved 13/11/2023.

20	ones nearby. For some, it was a place of healing after long illnesses and times of stress
21	or simply the background for many happy memories with friends and family. This isn't
22	unique to Sycamore Gap or the UK. Trees have given meaning to humanity for millennia,
23	whether the holy banyans in India, Japan's shinboku or the sacred groves found around
24	the globe.
25	Immersion in nature has been proven time and again to benefit our mental and physical
26	well-being. A study of 20,000 people by researchers at the University of Exeter
27	found that people who spent two hours a week in green spaces were substantially
28	more likely to report good health than those who didn't. The psychological
29	welfare of a population is linked to its proximity to nature and trees in both
30	urban and rural settings. Research has linked experiences in nature with
31	happiness, social cohesion, a sense of meaning, cognitive function, impulse inhibition
32	and children's school performance. So it's no wonder we are drawn to places like
33	Sycamore Gap.
34	Unfortunately, the same day of the massacre of the tree, a new report detailing the
35	state of Britain's natural landscapes was published. It should provoke the same
36	emotional outpouring.
37	The study found that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world.
38	One in six species are at risk of extinction. Forty-three per cent of British birds are
39	threatened, with skylarks dropping 59 per cent in abundance since monitoring began in
40	1970. Pollinating insects, such as bees, have decreased by 18 per cent on average, while
41	more than half of our flowering plants, mosses and relatives have disappeared from
42	areas where they used to thrive. It's a sobering assessment of a countryside struggling
43	with the effects of intensive farming, unsustainable fishing practices and climate
44	change. Indeed, it's worth noting that the butchered sycamore tree, a non-native
45	species, once stood among many others.

Although as mentioned the story does use a celebrity frame, it is already clear from the Abstract that it points in a different direction, via the reference to 'broader lessons' (1). The sub-title includes a deontic proposition, locating the piece in the domain of argumentative reporting – a genre that Iedema et al. (1994) call 'expository' rather than that of 'narrative journalism' (Van Krieken & Sanders 2017):

Nature makes us feel good, so let's preserve, protect and restore our living world (2)

It quickly shifts to an environmental frame, using the sycamore's story to promote three distinct discursive strands; firstly, that trees are important: 'Trees have given meaning to humanity for millennia' (22–3), secondly a string of sentences claim, in different ways, that 'Immersion in nature has been proven time and again to benefit our mental and physical well-being' (25–6), and finally that the act of vandalism towards the tree is symbolic of a wider pattern of environmental damage in the UK (37–45). As the story foreshadowed in the Abstract stage argues, it is because 'Nature makes us feel good' that we should protect the 'living world', and these details form part of the text's argumentative strategy. The instances of hyperbole such as 'butchering' (1, 44), 'tragedy' (15) and 'massacre' (34) serve the same rhetorical function. All three are dialogically provocative: as we saw from the Facebook* data above there are people, perhaps many, who feel that the whole story

represents an over-reaction to the fate of what is, in the last analysis, ‘just a tree’. These readers will question the application of verbs from the semantic domains of violence (massacre), animal husbandry (butcher) and human disaster (tragedy) to what they likely see as that of petty crime, vandalism, etc.

In the Orientation stage (table 6) the inclusion of a category of ‘non-human social actors’ allows us to note the many references to these elements, which are matched by a comparable number of references to plural human social actors. Whether the references are to ‘we/us/our’ or to general collective nouns like ‘humanity’ (22), ‘population’ (29), ‘people’(19, 27), it is plain that the main concern of the story is to trace ‘our’ relation with the natural world, represented here in the manifold references to non-human factors:

Table 6. Narrative Structure

Abstract	Beloved Sycamore Gap tree’s butchering offers broader lessons (1) Nature makes us feel good, so let’s preserve, protect and restore our living world (2)
Orientation	Who? Michael Gambon (3), a 16-year-old boy (13), we/us (2,13,15,16,25,32,41), the police (11), people (18–21,26–28,) children (32) <i>Non-human social actors</i> : the tree (1,6,8,9–10,18–21, 44–5), the holy banyan (23), Japan’s shinboku (23), trees (22,29), British birds (38), skylarks (39), pollinating insects (40), bees (40) When? On September 28 (3) What? Beloved Sycamore Gap tree’s butchering (1) Where? in northeast England next to Hadrian’s Wall (6)
Complication	Nature’s decline in the country goes far beyond Sycamore Gap (16–17)
Evaluation	<u>Beloved</u> Sycamore Gap tree’s <u>butchering</u> (1) the UK lost two <u>national treasures</u> (3) Framed <u>beautifully</u> by rising hillsides (7–8) a deliberate act of <u>vandalism</u> (11–12) an outpouring of <u>grief and anger</u> (13) take away from the <u>tragedy</u> (15) many <u>happy</u> memories with friends and family (21) <u>benefit</u> our mental and physical well-being (25–26) <u>good</u> health (28) the <u>massacre</u> of the tree (34) the same <u>emotional outpouring</u> (35–6) It’s a <u>sobering</u> assessment (42)
Result	The study found that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world. One in six species are at risk of extinction (37–8)
Coda	–

In this story the Complicating Action (16–17) is used to switch the focus, away from the Sycamore Gap story towards the presentation of more data in support of

the writer's overall thesis. In Iedema et al's terms (*ibid*), this blends the genre of 'News Story' with that of 'Media Exposition'. A lengthy paragraph (25–32) gives details of the 'benefit' to 'our mental and physical well-being' afforded by 'immersion in nature', and this leads smoothly into the final paragraph outlining details of species loss in the UK, which now finds itself 'one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world' (37). Thus, the Sycamore Gap story has been absorbed into the general environmental argument which permeates the piece, as follows:

SINCE Nature benefits our mental and physical well-being (25–6)

AND SINCE The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world (37)

THEREFORE We should preserve, protect and restore our living world (2)

Viewed in this light, the 'tragedy' of the Sycamore Gap tree loss is much less significant than the species loss outlined in the final paragraph, though it is important as a 'flagship' case study (Heywood 1995)¹³ that brings the issues squarely into the mediasphere and hence also to public awareness.

6. Discussion

In an important article, cited in Stibbe 2015 (p. 167), Guardian writer George Monbiot discusses the possible environmental impact of applying monetary measures of value to nature. This is specifically discussed in the case of a projected motorway development through an ancient wood near Sheffield where the developers, who appear to have government support for their actions, offer to replace Smithy Wood with 60,000 trees planted nearby. As he comments:

Who cares whether a tree is a hunched and fissured coppiced oak, worked by people for centuries, or a sapling planted beside a slip road with a rabbit guard around it? As Ronald Reagan remarked, when contemplating the destruction of California's giant redwoods, "a tree is a tree"¹⁴

As we have seen, the notion that the sycamore in question in this paper was 'just a tree' has been discursively opposed to those who use narrative to characterise it as a 'tragedy', as a 'massacre', 'torture', 'murder' or in the equally hyperbolic formula of one police commissioner, 'stealing joy.'¹⁵ People who share the former position will naturally not have participated in the 'emotional outpouring' over the sycamore's fate but rather wondered what all the fuss was about.

¹³ Flagship species have been defined as 'popular, charismatic species that serve as symbols and rallying points to stimulate conservation awareness and action' (Heywood 1995, in Verissimo et al. 2009).

¹⁴ Reframing the planet. Online at: <https://www.monbiot.com/2014/04/22/reframing-the-planet/>, retrieved 07/11/2023.

¹⁵ Guardian online: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2023/oct/05/felling-of-sycamore-gap-tree-damaged-hadrians-wall-inspection-reveals>, retrieved 15.11.2023.

However, from an Ecolinguistic perspective it is noticeable that, apart from those who express indifference or hostility towards those mourning over the sycamore, even some of those who do feel its loss do so in ways that align them more closely with what Naess calls ‘shallow’ rather than ‘deep’ ecological feelings and attitudes. He expresses the distinction as follows:

1. The Shallow Ecology movement. Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries.
2. The Deep Ecology movement: Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations [...] The ecological field-worker acquires a deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life. He reaches an understanding from within, a kind of understanding that others reserve for fellow men and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life. (Naess 1973: 95–6)

Shallow ecology is still ecology of a kind – it encompasses measures of unquestionable environmental benefit like differentiated rubbish collection, replacement of plastic with biodegradable materials in retail outlets, the switch to renewable energy and electric vehicles, the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol and other international treaties on the climate and environment. It is unquestionably pleasant for people to have trees and parklands, forests and groves for picnics, fishing outings and hiking – these things, as pointed out in the last story analysed, improve the quality of our lives – of those fortunate enough to live in what Naess calls the ‘developed countries’. One can only speculate on Naess’s likely response to the concept of a ‘Tree of the Year’ competition, surely more a manifestation of the excesses of first world media culture than of any genuine environmental feeling.

Naess’s perspective requires us to recognise that all nature is not there to serve wo/mankind’s every need, but rather that all forms of life contribute to an infinite net, each with their place and value. Closest to Naess’s perspective from the data studied above could be Tolkien, who objected to the ‘savage sound of the electric saw’ because its victims were not ‘just trees’ but living beings, with their own kind of consciousness. In his fictional work he built an imaginative tree-world that goes far beyond even Naess’s formula, but as his letters show, his feelings for everyday trees check up with some of the perspectives of Deep Ecology:

I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals.

7. Conclusion

The International Tree Foundation echoes the ecological sentiments of the last story, arguing that we should respond with the same emotional response to the general loss of trees worldwide, that this is potentially a bigger picture:

And so we bemoan a lost natural treasure. And rightly so, because it served for so many decades as a symbol of patience and resistance, an unchanging point on the landscape. But we ignore at our peril the bigger picture: the unstoppable trends of global forest destruction, habitat loss and ecosystem breakdown.

As true as this is, it is hard not to feel that even such environmental messages are wide of the mark in terms of a deep ecological perspective. ‘Ecosystem breakdown’ is seen as a bad thing primarily because of what it will mean for us, not because of its impact on ‘the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations’, on non-human ‘ways and forms of life’ – this is why we ignore it ‘at our peril’.

In their different ways, many of the protagonists and participants in the various stories and narrative fragments cited in the paper express sincere feelings of regret and loss for the sycamore, and in many cases this is linked to manifest appreciation of its nature-rich context. Though in some cases they are mourning a relative, they are clearly also emotionally affected by the loss of the tree itself. However, what is missing, in the mediated responses to the Sycamore Gap episode, is a sense of respect for the tree itself – as a tree, not as ‘more than just a tree’ – in Naess’s words, a feeling of ‘veneration’ or ‘understanding from within’. This is quite different from an emotional response to the tree’s celebrity status, its role as a heritage symbol, or to the idea that this tree had value because it was ‘more than just a tree’. Clearly, on the evidence of this paper, we have a long way to go in this regard.

References

- Bäckstrand, Karin & Eva Lövbrand. 2006. Planting trees to mitigate climate change: Contested discourses of ecological modernization, green governmentality and civic environmentalism. *Global Environmental Politics* 6 (1). 50–75.
- Bell, Allan 2005. News stories as narratives. In Inderjeet Mani, James Pustejovsky & Robert Gaizauskas (eds.), *The language of time: A reader*, 397–409. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blommaert, Jan & Piia Varis. 2015. *Enoughness, Accent and Light Communities: Essays on Contemporary Identities*. Babylon Centre. Online at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278933209_Enoughness_accent_and_light_communities_Essays_on_contemporary_identities, retrieved 9/11/2023.
- Chawla, Saroj 2001. Linguistic and philosophical roots of our ecological crisis. In Alwyn Fill & Peter Muhlhäuser (eds.), *The ecolinguistics reader. Language, ecology and environment*, 115–124. London and New York: Continuum,
- Davies, Margaret. 2015. *The Consciousness of Trees, Law and Literature* 27 (2). 217–235.
- Devall, Bill & George Sessions. 1985. *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith.
- Dryzek, John S. 2022. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford university press.
- Entman, Robert M. 1993. Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication: Autumn* 43 (4). 51–58.
- Fill, Alwin & Hermine Penz (eds.). 2018. Positive discourse analysis: Rethinking human ecological relationships. *The Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. London: Routledge. 165–179.

- Fill, Alwin & Peter Mühlhäusler. 2001. *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*. London: Continuum.
- Goatly, Andrew. 2017. Metaphor and Grammar in the Poetic Representation of Nature. *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1). 48–72.
- Goatly, Andrew. 2022. Five themes for ecostylistics. *Journal of World Languages* 8 (3). 443–485.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harper and Row: New York.
- Gottlieb, Roger S. 2006. *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and our Planet's Future*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Grusin, Richard. 2004. Premediation. *Criticism* 46 (1). *Materia Media [Special Issue]*. 17–39.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2002. *Politics in the Developing World: A Concise Introduction*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Halliday, Michael & Alexander Kirkwood. 1967. Notes on transitivity and theme in English: Part 2. *Journal of Linguistics* 3 (2). 199–244.
- Halliday, Michael & Alexander Kirkwood. 1992. New ways of analysing meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics. In Martin Pütz (ed.), *Thirty years of linguistic evolution*, 59–76. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Halliday, Michael & Alexander Kirkwood. 2010. *On Language and Linguistics*. London: Continuum.
- Heywood, Vernon H. 1995. *Global Biodiversity Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iedema, Rick, Susan Feez & Peter White. 1994. *Media Literacy*. Sydney, Disadvantaged Schools Program, NSW Department of School Education. Online at: <https://www.languageofevaluation.info/appraisal/media/medialit-comment.pdf>, retrieved 15/11/2023.
- Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Karban, Richard. 2015. *Plant Sensing and Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Labov, William. 1972. The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In William Labov (ed.), *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 354–396. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Martin, James. 2004. Mourning: How we get aligned. *Discourse and Society* 15 (2–3). 321–344.
- Martin, James. 2004. Positive discourse analysis: Power, solidarity and change. *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 49. 179–202.
- Naess, Arne. 1973. The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary. *Inquiry* 16 (1–4). 95–100.
- Naess, Arne. 1987. Self-Realization: An ecological approach to being in the world. *The Trumpeter* 4 (3).
- Naess, Arne. 2005. The deep ecology movement: Some philosophical aspects. In Alan Drengson (ed.), *The selected works of Arne Naess*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Naess, Arne. 2008. *Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*. Berkeley: Counterpoint.
- Naess, Arne. 2009. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Polkinghorne, Donald E. 1988. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ponton, Douglas Mark. (forthcoming) *Ecolinguistics: Ecological Principles and Narrative Practices*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Poole, Robert & Marco A. Micalay-Hurtado. 2022. A corpus-assisted ecolinguistic analysis of the representations of tree/s and forest/s in US discourse from 1820–2019. *Applied Corpus Linguistics* 2 (3).
- Powers, Richard. 2018. *The Overstory: A Novel*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Ryan, John C., Patricia Vieria & Monica Gagliano (eds.). 2021. *The Mind of Plants: Narratives of Vegetal Intelligence*. Synergetic Press (online): <https://bookscouter.com/publisher/synergetic-pr>
- Schultz, Beth. 2001. Language and the natural environment. In Alwyn Phil & Peter Muhlhausler (eds.), *The ecolinguistics reader. Language, ecology and environment*, 109–114. London and New York: Continuum.
- Shafak, Elif. 2021. *The Island of Missing Trees*. London: Penguin,
- Shirania, Fiona, Catherine Butlerb, Karen Henwood, Karen Parkhill & Nick Pidgeon. 2015. ‘I’m not a tree hugger, I’m just like you’: Changing perceptions of sustainable lifestyles. *Environmental Politics* 24 (1). 57–74.
- Siikamaki, Juha Veikko, Alan Jeff Krupnick, Jon Strand & Jeffrey Vincent. 2019. International willingness to pay for the protection of the Amazon rainforest. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8775*, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3360132>
- Sperber, Dan & Deirdre Wilson. 1986. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2007. Haiku and beyond: Language, ecology, and reconnection with the natural world. *Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Interactions of People and Animals* 20 (2). 101–112.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2012. *Animals Erased: Discourse, Ecology, and Reconnection with the Natural World*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2014. An ecolinguistic approach to critical discourse studies. *Critical Discourse Studies* 11 (1). 117–128.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2015. *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live by*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2019. Discovering the weatherworld: Combining ecolinguistics, ecocriticism, and lived experience. In Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan & Vidya Sarveswaran (eds.), *Routledge handbook of ecocriticism and environmental communication*, 71–83. Routledge: Abingdon.
- Suzuki, David T, Amanda McConnell & Mason Adrienne. 2008. *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Trewavas, Anthony. 2014. *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Krieken, Kobie & José Sanders. 2017. Framing narrative journalism as a new genre: A case study of the Netherlands. *Journalism* 18 (10). 1364–1380.
- Verissimo, Diogo, Iain Fraser, Jim J. Groombridge, Rachel Bristol & Douglas C. MacMillan. 2009. Birds as tourism flagship species: A case study of tropical islands. *Animal Conservation* 12. Online at: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1755-263X.2010.00151.x>, retrieved 15.11.2023.
- Virdis, Daniela Francesca. 2022. *Ecological Stylistics: Ecostylistic Approaches to Discourses of Nature, the Environment and Sustainability*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilson, Deirdre & Dan Sperber. 1994. Outline of relevance theory. *Hermes* 1. 85–106.

- Wilson, Robert, E., Samuel D. Gosling & Lindsay T. Graham. 2012. A review of Facebook* research in the social sciences. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7 (3). 203–220.
- Wohlleben, Peter. 2016. *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*. Ebook: Greystone.
- Zappettini, Franco, Douglas M. Ponton & Tatiana V. Larina. 2021. Emotionalisation of contemporary media discourse: A research agenda. *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 25 (3). 586–610.

Article history:

Received: 20 September 2023

Accepted: 18 November 2023

Bionote:

Douglas Mark PONTON is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania (Italy). His research interests include political discourse analysis, ecolinguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, pragmatics and critical discourse studies. He has held teaching and research positions at the universities of Catania, Messina and Pisa. His most recent research projects concern the Montalbano effect on tourism in Sicily, ecological questions in Sicily, and Sicilian dialect theatre. He is linguistic consultant for Vernon Press and is peer reviewer for numerous international journals.

e-mail: dmponton@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9968-1162>

Сведения об авторе:

Дуглас Марк ПОНТОН – профессор, преподаватель английского языка и перевода на кафедре политических и социальных наук в Катанийском университете (Италия). Сфера его научных интересов включает анализ политического дискурса, эколингвистику, социолингвистику, прикладную лингвистику, прагматику и критический дискурс-анализ. Преподавал в университетах Катании, Мессины и Пизы. Его недавние исследовательские проекты связаны с влиянием «эффекта Монтельбано» на туризм в Сицилии, с экологическими проблемами в Сицилии и сицилийским диалектным театром. Является консультантом по лингвистике в *Vernon Press* и рецензентом в ряде международных журналов.

e-mail: dmponton@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9968-1162>