

Institution: University of Gloucestershire
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Ecological Linguistics Research and its impact on Education for Sustainability
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study highlights the pioneering research of Arran Stibbe in the emerging discipline of Ecological Linguistics, and the impact of this research beyond academia in developing Education for Sustainability in English disciplines and beyond. Environmental issues have traditionally been considered a matter more for the sciences than the humanities. However, Dr Stibbe's detailed linguistic analyses of environmental discourses, his many keynote presentations and newsletter articles for the Higher Education Academy, and the seminal <i>Handbook of Sustainability Literacy</i> have demonstrated how linguistics can address environmental issues, and informed the curricula of multiple institutions across the world, as evidenced by testimonials and the findings of independent research.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Arran Stibbe is a Reader in Ecological Linguistics and has worked at the University of Gloucestershire since September 2005. During this time a key strand in his research has been the application of discourse analysis to a wide range of ways in which language use adversely or positively impacts on the ecological systems which support life. Dr Stibbe has demonstrated, for instance, detailed linguistic mechanisms by which economic, consumerist, and agricultural discourses, as well as environmental reports, nature poetry and films encourage people to treat the environment with respect or to destroy it. This ecological linguistics research has been published in a book and a wide range of peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, some of which appear in section 3.</p> <p>Key findings of the research include evidenced expositions of the detailed linguistic mechanisms by which a) economic discourses disregard the dependence of the economy on wider ecosystems b) the construction of gender in lifestyle magazines encourages environmentally damaging consumerism c) the discourse of animal product industries represents animals in ways that lead to ecologically damaging agricultural systems d) discourses of ecology and environmentalism often fail to break free from limiting assumptions e) cultures across the world can provide alternative discourses that encode ways of thinking that can be useful in addressing ecological issues. The research has thus extended pre-existing discourse analysis techniques to the rarely addressed area of ecological issues. However, beyond this, it has also developed new theoretical approaches for the new context. Among the theoretical advances are a) the use of an 'ecosophical framework' (Guattari's term) to supply criteria for evaluating environmental discourses against, b) the extension of identity performance theory to include ecological identities, and c) a rethinking of the concept of 'cultural hegemony' within an ecological context.</p> <p>The most important finding of the research is a general one: that critical analysis of language can play an important role in addressing ecological issues through investigating and questioning the linguistic construction of current society. This has profound implications for pedagogy and curriculum content across a range of disciplines and another strand of Dr Stibbe's research applies insights gained from ecological linguistics to Education for Sustainability and Communication for Ethical Leadership. This pedagogical research includes the development of frameworks and materials for incorporating ecological linguistics within a range of English related disciplines (English language, literature, creative writing, classics, linguistics, media and cultural studies).</p> <p>All the research considered in this case study took place between September 2005 and September 2013 and was conducted by Arran Stibbe during his time as lecturer and then later Reader in the School of Humanities at the University of Gloucestershire.</p>

3. References to the research

1. Stibbe, Arran (2012) *Animals erased: discourse, ecology and reconnection with the natural world*. Wesleyan University Press
2. Stibbe, Arran (2010) Ecolinguistics and globalisation. In Nikolas Coupland (ed) *The Blackwell Handbook of Language and Globalisation*. London: Blackwell
3. Stibbe, Arran (2009) *The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy: skills for a changing world*. Dartington: Green Books [editor, introduction and one chapter]
4. Stibbe, Arran (2007) Zen and the Art of Environmental Education in the Japanese Animated Film 'Tonari no Totoro'. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1:4:468-488 (Equinox)
5. Stibbe, Arran (2007) Haiku and beyond: language, ecology and reconnection with the natural world. *Anthrozoös* 20:2:101-112 (Berg)
6. Stibbe, Arran (2005) Environmental education across cultures: beyond the discourse of shallow environmentalism. *Language & Intercultural Communication* 4:4:242-260 (Routledge)

Quality indicators: Item 1 was peer reviewed by 3 anonymous reviewers, with positive comments such as "*Amazingly clear and incisive readings of a wide range of discourses related to animals and ecology. With an impressive eye for detail and the 'big picture,' the book gives real insights into the relationship between language, values, and actions.*" Item 2 received positive reviews in the Times Higher Education, The Journal of Environmental Education, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, The Australian Journal of Environmental Education and other journals. Item 3 was a chapter of a book which won the main *British Association of Applied Linguistics* book prize in 2010. The other items were all published in peer review journals.

4. Details of the impact

"The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy was a landmark publication which has had an immense impact on the integration of sustainability into teaching practice across the HE sector." (source 3 in section 5)

The first type of impact of the research is the direct kind that occurs when producers of a discourse read research which exposes unintended negative consequences of the forms of language they are using and change both their language and practice as a result. One example is the animal products industry, where the industry journal *Poultry Science* published an article directly and extensively quoting from Dr Stibbe's research and concluding that it is '*necessary to reconsider several aspects of animal production relative to ideology, discourse, and practice... a real ethic of care and respect... must be embodied not just in our practices but also in the internal and external discourse of animal agriculture*' (source 8). This is important because it shows that ecolinguistic research articles are read by those in the industry, understood, and can lead to internal calls for action. Similarly, research by Arran Stibbe which exposed hidden messages in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was read by the director who, as a direct result, called for future reports to be more balanced in their representation of the natural world. The research was published in an accessible form in conservationist publication *ECOS* and in Scottish National Heritage's in-house newsletter in 2012, receiving praise from practitioners 'on the ground' as being useful for their communication practices (source 5). This led to an invitation from the United Nations Environment Programme for Dr Stibbe to be part of a working group examining humanities approaches to improving national ecosystem assessment reports, and a role as reviewer of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment. What started as a critique of ecosystem assessment discourse from the outside ended up as a chance to work directly with the producers of the discourse and help shape it through a range of reports that Dr Stibbe has written as part of his work with UNEP (source 4).

To multiply further impacts, Dr Stibbe founded a research network in 2004, the *Language and Ecology Research Forum*, whose membership has more than doubled since 2008 to reach 272 researchers from around the world (source 7). The Forum disseminates and develops the theories of ecological linguistics, and members write articles which critique specific discourses, exposing hidden messages which encourage people to protect or destroy the environment, with the aim of having an impact on those who produce the discourses. So far the Forum has published 44 articles

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and membership is continuously growing.

The second type of impact is on curricula and the pedagogical practices of educators across the UK and the world. Dr Stibbe has conducted extensive outreach activities to inform educators about the findings of the theoretical and pedagogical research. Since 2008 he has given keynote speeches for the English Subject Centre, the Art Design and Media Subject Centre, and the Institution for Environmental Scientists; presentations for the HCA Subject Centre and the LLAS Subject Centre; and guest lectures at Cardiff University, Schumacher College, Oxford Brookes University and other institutions. He has written feature articles on ecological linguistic pedagogy specifically tailored to a) English language, literature and creative writing for the English Subject Centre b) media and culture studies for the ADM Centre, and c) linguistics subjects for the LLAS Centre. Hard copies of some of these publications were delivered directly to approximately 3000 lecturing staff in the UK. This is in addition to case studies for the English Subject Centre website and numerous journal articles and book chapters which disseminate the pedagogy to lecturers across disciplines. In this way the underpinning research was converted into a form that is practically and directly useful for teachers 'on the ground', and evidence shows that they have both used these resources and benefited from them in the period 2008-2013 (source 2 and 6).

Dr Stibbe has also applied his research beyond humanities disciplines by taking a leading role in Education for Sustainability generally in the UK, as convenor of the Sustainability in Higher Education Developer's group (SHED) from 2006-2012. SHED is the main forum for sustainability educators in the UK and is a joint project of the EAUC and HEA. As part of this role, Dr Stibbe organised a major national project sponsored by the HEA involving a conference, seminars and the editing of the book *The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy* (published in 2009). This handbook applies the underpinning research by giving a prominent role to ecological linguistics within education for sustainability, as well as bringing together perspectives from educators across a large number of disciplines. The book, and its corresponding multimedia website which includes video interviews with authors and all 51 chapters, has sold over 3400 copies, received tens of thousands of views on the website per year, has been favourably reviewed by numerous publications and played a practical role in transforming teaching (source 3 and 6). Complimentary copies of the book were sent to all HEA subject centres and 370 key individuals and institutions across the country on their request. Dr Stibbe was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2009 for being 'known nationally and internationally for his contribution to Education for Sustainability', 'making a significant contribution to Education for Sustainability within the English Language discipline' and 'bringing together a community of educators from across the UK for national efforts to update education' (NTFS website).

Initial testimonials gathered by the University of Gloucestershire revealed that the research had had an impact on curricula in a variety of educational institutions in the period 2008-2013 (summarised in source 6). A new module, *Ecological Linguistics*, has been developed and successfully run at Cardiff University from 2011 based strongly on the theoretical concepts and pedagogical approaches arising from Dr Stibbe's research. The testimonials also revealed that the work of Dr Stibbe has been drawn from and incorporated into the curriculum at the University of York, Nottingham University, Greenwich University, South Downs College, London South Bank University, Ball State University, the University of Graz, the University of Modena, the University of New Mexico, and Luxemburg University among others. An indication of the extent of the impact is demonstrated by testimonials gathered such as '*The work of Arran Stibbe and the work that emerges from the Language and Ecology Research Forum have had a tremendous impact on my teaching... In addition, both the Forum and Dr Stibbe have influenced the International Environmental Communication Association*' (source 1).

To gain systematic and independent evidence of the impact, a consultancy firm, *The Innovation Partnership Ltd*, was commissioned to conduct research and write a report (source 6). The resulting report 'The Ecological Linguistics Research of Arran Stibbe and its Impact on Education for Sustainability' was based on structured questionnaires of academic staff in 12 institutions and is available for inspection. The key findings of the report are a) all respondents had used research produced by Dr Stibbe within the period 2008-2012 b) all stated that Dr Stibbe's research had

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developed the area of Education for Sustainability generally, the majority indicating ‘significantly’ c) 75% indicated that Dr Stibbe’s work had had an impact specifically on Education for Sustainability in the linguistics discipline, 66% for English Literature, and 66% for Cultural Studies d) 92% of respondents confirmed that Dr Stibbe’s work had influenced their teaching, particularly general thinking, content of courses and pedagogy, and e) 83% confirmed that Dr Stibbe’s work had impacted upon the understanding of their students. Multiple respondents described how the curriculum change based on Dr Stibbe’s work had helped make students more aware of the linkage between the environment, nature, and conservation on one hand and language on the other. For example, one respondent wrote ‘Students appreciate the insertion of topics about the environment and are fascinated by the possibility of working on these issues from a linguistic point of view’ (source 6). The report also found evidence that Dr Stibbe’s research had facilitated engagement with various organisations in both the voluntary and commercial sectors, and concludes that ‘A greater appreciation of sustainability-related issues, and of what sustainability means in practice, as opposed to in the abstract, were key impact areas...It was also noted that Dr Stibbe’s work has impacted upon the whole student journey, from specific projects undertaken during study, to decisions about future careers once study has been completed’ (source 6).

Finally, the research has had ripple effects in inspiring others to work actively to promote the linkage between language and environmental issues, as the following testimonial illustrates:

“Arran Stibbe’s work and writings have influenced our thinking and ideas, and encouraged us to embark on a project that is now about to come to fruition. He once said that the world needed more storytellers to engage with environmental issues. Having been very active in this field for many years, we decided to heed his call. The outcome is a book: entitled *Storytelling for a Greener World* by 21 leading environmentalists who are also professional storytellers and authors. Jonathan Porritt (CEO of Forum for the Future) has written an enthusiastic Foreword and we have already received great support from other leaders in the field” (from the editors of the book).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Associate professor, University of New Mexico, and founder member of the IECA will confirm the impact on ecolinguistics teaching in her institution and elsewhere in the USA.
2. Emeritus Professor of English and Cultural Studies, and former director of the HEA English Subject Centre, will confirm the impact on English Language teaching in the UK.
3. Visiting Professor in Learning for Sustainability, University of the West of England, and former chair of the HEA ESD Advisory Group, will confirm the impact of Arran Stibbe’s work on *Education for Sustainability* generally in the UK
4. Professor of American and Environmental History at Bristol University, and chair of UNEP’s working group *Arts & Humanities Perspectives on Cultural Ecosystem Services*, will confirm the impact that Dr Stibbe had through his work with UNEP on the National Ecosystem Assessment
5. Assistant Editor of *Ecoss: a review of conservation* will confirm the impact of Dr Stibbe’s work on conservationists
6. The Innovation Partnership Ltd. have conducted research and produced a report entitled *The Ecological Linguistics Research of Arran Stibbe and its Impact on Education for Sustainability*. This confidential report is available on request.
7. The *Language and Ecology Research Forum* (www.ecoling.net)
8. Croney, C. and R. Reynnells (2008) The ethics of semantics: do we clarify or obfuscate reality to influence perceptions of farm animal production? *Poultry Science* 87:2:387-91.