

Ecological Stylistics: Between Theory and Practice

Daniela Francesca Viridis

Associate Professor of English Language and Translation
University of Cagliari

Text 1: "nature" – WWF

[1] It is customary to think of nature and culture as being quite different, belonging to entirely separate domains, one contains items such as butterflies, the Amazon rainforest and photosynthesis, while the other contains items such as Beethoven's piano sonatas, wedding ceremonies or sushi. [2] Yet nature and culture often interpenetrate and overlap. [3] What is wine-making, bee-keeping or gardening: nature or culture? [4] They are undoubtedly human activities, and each has its own culture, but there is a strong element of nature involved. [5] What about varieties of domesticated plants and animals? [6] They are human creations because their genomes have been altered by thousands of generations of selective breeding, and particular breeds may be associated with particular places or peoples, so they are as much a product of culture as of nature. [7] What about landscapes? [8] Is there anywhere left in the world that is entirely natural, untouched by human intervention? [9] The deep sea bed perhaps, and possibly Antarctica; but most landscapes are, to a greater or lesser extent, the product of human culture too. [10] Even the Amazon rainforest is what it is not just because of the natural evolution of its ecosystems, but also because of centuries of human manipulations to those ecosystems. [11] So would it make more sense to think of all the myriad manifestations of nature and culture as expressions of a single concept, a nature-culture nexus?

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Text 2: "environment" – Greenpeace

[1] We must restore our Earth

[2] Mother Earth is estimated to be around 4.5 billion years old. [3] She is weary, disheveled and drained. [4] Given what she's been through, she feels cranky, frustrated and tired of humans. [5] Who can blame her?

[6] We've always been needy and greedy. [7] We keep depleting Earth's natural resources without remorse or restitution. [8] In fact, we've been using up Earth's resources at an alarming rate. [9] Currently, we are using up 1.6 times more than what the Earth can regenerate in a year.

[10] [10a] Though she may be resilient, [10b] we need to give Mother Earth a break — we must offer her a lifeline.

[11] We need to stop treating the environment as a commodity and as an infinite resource because doing so would be fatal.

[12] With this "new normal", we must learn to reconnect with nature and consider the environment in everything we do. [13] If there's anything to learn from the pandemic, it is that governments need to shift their priorities and invest on [sic] human and planetary health to make the world resilient to future shocks.

[14] We need to decarbonise economies and shift to renewable energy systems to mitigate global warming. [15] Efforts to protect at least 30% of the world's oceans by 2030 must be supported to save marine biodiversity and to help save the climate. [16] Forests that have stood the test of time and teeming with life must be preserved and protected from corporate interests that want to profit from it [sic]. [17] Indigenous Peoples, with their ancient wisdom of the natural world[,] must be empowered and recognised.

[18] She may be old and complex. [19] But undoubtedly, Earth is a fine place and worth fighting for.

(Source: Greenpeace International (<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/47338/earth-to-humans/>).

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Text 3: "ecosystem"—Forestry England

[1] Walking along the water's edge, small tree stumps dot the area. [2] The wood has been chiselled into a pencil-like point, as if sharpened with a knife. [3] Webbed hind footprints in the mud are another sign that a forester did not fell these trees. [4] They were felled by one of nature's greatest engineers, the beaver.

[5] The Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) is a large semi-aquatic mammal and one of the largest rodents in the world.

[6] Their thick, waterproof fur and broad, leathery tail make them excellent swimmers. [7] Known for tree felling and dam building, beavers have huge orange teeth hardened with iron that they used [sic] to "coppice" waterside trees by gnawing on the stems.

[8] These charismatic creatures were once widespread throughout Britain. [9] However, beavers were heavily hunted for their fur and scent glands that produce a substance called castoreum. [10] By the beginning of the 16th century the beaver became extinct from the country. [11] Their absence has changed landscapes ever since.

[12] Ecosystem engineers

[13] Beavers play an important role in complex wetland ecosystems, creating habitats for many other plant, insect and mammal species. [14] Few other animals have the ability to modify and shape their surrounding environment like the beaver does. [15] Their damming creates complex pools and riffles, providing both deeper water and shallow, fast-flowing areas, important for a range of aquatic life. [16] The coppicing they do opens up the canopy, creating areas of vegetation great for breeding birds. [17] How they feed increases deadwood in the watercourse, which leads to an abundance of invertebrates. [18] For these reasons, beavers are often referred to as “ecosystem engineers” and known as a keystone species. [19] Where beavers return, they can help to restore an entire ecosystem.

[20] Their return can benefit people too. [21] Beaver dams increase water storage and slow the flow of water downstream, potentially reducing the impact of flooding in the surrounding area. [22] The dams are a real feat of engineering in themselves. [23] The largest are 2-metre-high woven structures of branches and vegetation packed with mud to hold back the water.

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Text 4: “ecology”—National Park Service

[1] Indigenous knowledge, also known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), is increasingly being applied in the field of wildlife conservation. [2] According to Huntington (1998), TEK offers ecological information and insights relevant to ecological management and research that cannot be obtained from other sources. [3] For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have used biological knowledge of their local environment to sustain themselves and to maintain their cultural identity. [4] Indigenous peoples from around the world possess a broad knowledge base of complex ecological systems in their own localities (Gadgil et al. 1993). [5] This information functions within time-tested resource management systems of long-resident peoples. [6] Yet, the involvement of Indigenous people remains rare and Western science often overlooks and disparages these Indigenous systems and associated TEK (Westley and Miller 2003). [7] According to many scholars, TEK parallels the scientific discipline of Ecology because both TEK and Western science share observation and description of the empirical world. [8] Here, I present examples of how TEK has been used to inform the field of Conservation Biology, and use the terms TEK and Indigenous interchangeably.

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Text 5: “sustainability” — Navdanya

[1] The Corona lockdown has forced us to shed the clutter and the speed and become an invitation to humanity to differentiate between the essential and non-essential.

[2] In making us stay home, the crisis creates the possibility of realising that no matter who we are, where we are, we are members of one Earth Family and share a common home, our beautiful Earth. [3] We are part of Nature, not separate from it nor superior to it.

[4] Living on the earth with other beings makes simplicity (shedding the clutter) an ethical and ecological obligation. [5] By taking simply what we need to sustain our life, living within ecological and planetary boundaries, we leave vital ecological space for other beings.

[6] All beings need their share of ecological space and the right to participate in the living processes which ensure food and water for all. [7] By extracting more from the earth, we overstep the limits of our rightful share, disrupt planetary boundaries, ecological limits as well as the integrity of species. [8] In the web of life species sustain each other. [9] Sustainability and justice are interconnected, and robbing others of their rightful share deprives them of their basic needs with a deepening crises [sic] of food and water, poverty, hunger and starvation.

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