Ecostylistics: A Systemic Review of Major Recent Studies

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Abstract

This paper presents a review of major recent contributions in the emergent field of ecostylistics. Moreover, this study deals with the issues, roots, and meanings of ecostylistics. The main focus is on how and why style is combined with ‘eco’ to become ecostylistics and how language is related to this subject. It also deals with the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the main definitions of key terms related to this study. The second section, reveals the major application of ecostylistics frameworks in the analysis of different data, for example, media discourse. Finally, the third section is about previous studies related to ecostylistics in analyzing literary texts poems, fiction and non-fiction works.

Keywords: Ecostylistics, Stylistics, Media discourse, Literature

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Ecostylistics, Ecolinguistics and Stylistics

Ecostylistics also known as Green stylistics is a new eco word that designates a new approach that overlaps with both ecolinguistics and ecocriticism (Zurru, 2017). Ecostylistics analysis can be a complement to the ecocritical explanation of a literary text. Stylistic analysis is a way of associating linguistic form with interpretation in a detailed way via reader inference and presenting explicit evidence against a specific explanation of text (Short, 1996).

Ecostylistics concentrates on two perspectives: First, the relation between the style of a literary text, physical environment, and linguistic representation. Second, the evaluation and investigation of ecological linguistic patterns in text, thereby contributing to increased global environmental awareness (Zurru, 2017). Ecostylistics is concerned with the stylistic analysis of humanity, natural space, and landscape in different text types, for this reason, it participates to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the landscape, environments, and its human and animal inhabitants taking a position in the social science and humanities (Virdis, 2022). Furthermore, Bate (1991) states that "Ecostylistics is, in some ways, a 'new' form of Romantic ideology in which the understanding and appreciation for nature's active energy help people to "better exist in the human world by entering into harmony with the environment" (p.40).

Ecostylistics is a cutting-edge academic method within the context of stylistics as a whole. It can benefits the eclectic nature in borrowing methods from other fields (Jaafar & Ganapathy, 2022; Jaafar, 2014, Jaafar 2022).

In addition, the broad theoretical and methodological framework that stylistics offers helps ecostylistics to explore the linguistic analysis of ecological elements of both literary and non-literary texts and discourse. Therefore, ecolinguistics and ecoenergyistics have a similar interest in the linguistic creation of texts and discursive practices connected to the environment and ecology (Zurru, 2017, p.196).

There are two major theoretical goals of ecoenergyistics. The first is related to the environment and is concerned with the depiction of physical or metaphorical landscapes and surroundings in texts whereas the second is ecological. The analytical goal is to combine a standard methodological technique and theoretical interest in stylistics, specifically, attentive linguistic reading of the text to the research of mental style with SFG in order to analyze selected extracts from the selected novels (Douthwaite, et al., 2017). The current study advocates for the use of the entire range of methodological and analytical approaches used in mainstream stylistics and neighboring disciplines to critically investigate the stylistic choices made in literary and non-literary texts centered on the representation of landscape.

1.1 Stylistics as a Multidisciplinary Field of Study

An understanding of the patterns and functions of language in use is provided by contemporary stylistics, which examines literature using concepts and theories from the study of language. Gibbons and Whiteley (2018, p.3) state that “In contemporary stylistics, style is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between linguistic form and literary meaning and interpretation”.

A subfield of linguistics known as stylistics focuses on the systematic examination of language style and how it might change depending on a variety of criteria, such as genre, context, historical time, and author. For instance, there are distinctive writing styles that set one author apart from another, the
styles connected to specific genres (such as newspaper language or the gothic book), or the traits that may be considered literary style (Crystal & Davy, 1969). In this sense, analyzing style is methodically examining the formal elements of a text to determine how important they are to the text's interpretation (Wales, 2011).

Rather than creating its own original theories, stylistics usually borrows theories and approaches from other disciplines. This is because it combines a number of linguistic sub-disciplines with other disciplines, such as literary studies and psychology, and takes inspiration from them without trying to duplicate or replace them. It adopts a certain perspective on the communication process that puts the text at the center of its concerns while also being concerned with the interaction between the author and the text, the reader and the text, as well as the larger settings of text generation and reception (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). A stylistic analysis strives to either convey something fascinating about literature utilizing ideas and frameworks from language, or depending on the interests of the analyst and the goals of the study project (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018; Jaafar, 2020; Jaafar, 2019).

Steen (2014, p. 315) states that “The stylistic study of metaphor involves the idiosyncratic way metaphor is used in specific texts, by individual authors or, more broadly, sets of authors forming a school, generation or similar social groupings”. Therefore, in terms of metaphor, stylistics describes and interprets the cross-domain comparison between the target and the source. The underlying assumptions behind it, what the specific semantic qualities that link and do not link the target to the source.

According to Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse (2010, p. 2) the study of stylistics examines how meaning is expressed via language in literature and other forms of writing. In order to do this, stylisticians employ language models, theories, and frameworks as their analytical devices. In addition, since literary works have received the majority of stylistic attention to date, it makes sense that stylistics is frequently seen as a linguistic approach to literature (Norgaard et al., 2010).

1-Previous Studies

This section is divided into two parts. Part one is about general studies of ecostylistics. Part two is about studies of ecostylistics in literature.

2.1 Ecostylistics and Media

Virdis (2022) presents an ecostylistic analysis of the article entitled How Beavers are Returning to England’s Forests (n.d.) on the environmental website. She emphasizes how the marker word ecosystem is used in the environment, and the useful ecostylistic tools associated with it. She examines the stylistic uses of foregrounding, point of view, and metaphor in the text with a focus on the analysis by using SFG (Virdis, pp.143-149), as well as the marker word ecosystem.

Virdis uses foregrounding (repetition and deviation). The foregrounded elements are specific clause types that exhibit particular patterns of transitivity. Repetition (repeating the syntactic structure, or words) is exemplified through several instances, such as the repetition of some terms like thick, waterproof, and broad, leathery, or the repetition of some syntactic structures such as tree felling and dam building, modify and shape and so on. In comparison, an example of deviance is found in Ecosystem engineers (semantic deviation) since this noun refers to a person, not to an animal.
In terms of the point of view, Virdis (2022) focuses on the psychological and ideological points of view, and the epistemic model (Simpson, 2010). To begin with, the psychological point of view echoes how the narrator's or character's unique perception, awareness, or knowledge might have an impact on the text. For example, the wood represents as "a pencil-like point, as if sharpened with a knife" (Virdis, 2022, p. 148). Hence, the narrator must have deviated from the standard (or norms) for some reason (Virdis, 2022). Regarding the ideological point of view explains how the text depends on the beliefs, values, and worldviews of its author-narrator. For example, “heavily hunted” and “extinct” allude to annoying details to build sympathy for beavers in the recipient (Virdis, 2022, p. 146). Concerning the epistemic model, its key aspect embodies the linguistic concepts of knowledge, belief, and cognition. Virdis (2022) attempts to combine it with the modality of Halliday (2014). For example, can, must, often, potentially, always, usually, and sometimes.

According to Virdis (2022), the word ecosystem is introduced utilizing the conceptual metaphor of the noun phrase ecosystem engineers. The word Engineers is regarded as a metaphor since it denotes beavers rather than people. In her analysis, Virdis uses SFG (Halliday, 2014[ 1985]) such as in “the wood has been chiselled” wherein the passive is used without an agent; the preposition by introduces a passive phrase indicating that the agent of the material chiseling process is unknown.

To conclude, Virdis analyzes the article to focus on ecosystem and the stylistic tools are related to it. She proves that the sense of a text is reliant on the stylistic components, yet any given combination of features can both generate and be used to deviate from a standard.

Applying ecostylistics methods from different perspectives by Tan (2021) examines the naming of residential buildings in Singapore from the perspective of the cityscape as a text, using linguistic landscape research methods. By analyzing the choices made in naming these buildings, the author explores whether a naming style can be identified based on meaningful selections related to framing the place. His study demonstrates how the naming choices index key features of identity, categorizing the selections as either authentic or inauthentic based on the relationship between the place and identity they aim to communicate.

Another study on buildings but focusing on a museum exhibition. Visitors to the "Future City" exhibition are given the opportunity to make their own contributions to protect nature, but only after viewing two introductory videos. Zurru(2021) examines the style of these videos. Regarding perspective, word choice, the integration of both general and specialized language, and the use of multimodal metaphors, the two videos shown at the beginning of the exhibition served a dual purpose the first is to promote a more profound engagement with ecological issues through ecostylistics, leading to an expansion of its objectives and scope, and the second is to illustrate how the stylistic decisions in these videos shape the visitors' responses to subsequent activities and assist them in enhancing their environmental consciousness by making topics like climate change and sustainability understandable to both children and adults.

Other scholars have shown interest in the intersection of ecostylistics and architecture, such as Pillière (2021), who examines the linguistic techniques utilized in a city museum. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the interpretive labels and the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery at the Museum of London, with the purpose of illustrating that these texts aim to connect with the public and convey a particular representation of London and its diverse perspectives.
2-Ecostylistic Approaches to Literature

This part of the study presents studies that applied ecostylistics techniques in literary text analysis. Some of the studies dealt with poetic language and others dealt with fiction and non-fiction narration.

3.1 Goatly’s (2017) Study

Goatly (2017) uses Thomas’s poems (1936) as a case study in ecostylistics. He employs SFG (Halliday, 1985) to analyze the nature-indicating noun phrases. The categories of weather, seasons/months, trees, water, dark/light, and birds present significant sayers and actors since nature is active. He explicates how Thomas intentionally obliterated the nature of humanity through the interaction of personification, coordination, and token of a human and non-human. Goatly also elucidates the way Thomas focuses on the use of imaginary symbols linked to Graham Hough’s (1961).

To explain the style of Thomas’ poetry theoretically, Goatly attempts to locate it with Hough’s (1961) literary theory. There is a circle or clock containing numbers and each number refers to something specific. There are two columns in Hough’s clock. At 12 is a naïve allegory where the most abstract thematic elements are located in the text. At 3 calling incarnation works on the balance between concrete and abstract. At 4 or 5 is the realistic fiction as the novel. At 7, there is fiction but still, the main focus is on the concrete. At 9 is symbolism; there is a balance between the concrete and abstract. Finally, at 10 or 11 is emblem literature where the abstract is hidden inside the concrete sign (Goatly, 2017).

Goatly (2017) focuses in his study on the genitive power of natural participants; he notes that all noun phrases are identified as natural objects. The noun phrases are subdivided into human and non-human. Furthermore, he focuses on the activation of personification, tokens, or existents. He analyzes the texts by using Hallidayan transitivity categories since. The readers of Thomas’ poems encounter verbs that belong to multiple processes such as the verb appear that belongs to the material and relational process, or are a literary one type of process, but are used metaphorically in the context like the verb attack which belongs to the material and verbal process. He highlights the coordination and apposition of natural objects and humans; he believes that Thomas combines humanity with nature, and does not exclude machines. Moreover, the poet links birds and their singing with humankind.

Goatly (2017) mentions that natural category noun phrases are used as vehicle words in inventive similes and analogies more frequently than metaphors in Thomas’ poetry, providing evidence for developing simile theory. Similes are contrasted with literal comparisons. He believes that the important way to explain the movement of comparison from simile to literal is to regard the type and degree of shared context between topic and vehicle. In addition, He focuses on the use of symbolism to compare what is metaphorical and what is a literal description. He believes that it is necessary that this boundary between the literal and metaphorical, the real and fiction, must be dissolved. To put it differently, there is a psychological connection between actual and unactual, what is the truth, what is exile, and what is home. In Goatly’s (2017) transitivity analysis, it is found that birds have the most important role in Thomas’s poetry presented as sayers or communicators. He notes that the poet contrasts the bird’s tone with human language. To conclude, the ecostylistic analysis of this case study has mainly focused on the way nature is perceived as active in Thomas’ poems. Goatly asserts that Thomas displays the differences
between simile and literal comparison, also using imagism and metaphor. These aspects of style are related to romantic ecology, focusing on the blurring between humans and nature.

3.2 Goatly (2021) Study

In his latest study, Goatly (2021) focuses on the marked theme in SFG, conceptual metaphor or symbolism in his analysis of Housman's poem. ‘A Shropshire Lad’ (2010) is set in a semi-imaginary pastoral Shropshire and explores the helplessness of man, the fragility of life, and the terrible impacts of war against the backdrop of a miserable beautiful landscape. He uses these poems to reveal the semantic field: place, direction, orientation, and space. These semantic fields have been recognized as an important source for conceptual metaphor, and this study looks at how place and direction are used frequently in specified theme positions for their symbolic significance. According to Goatly (2021), a marked theme in textual meta-function refers to the initial component of a clause which can be the subject, verb, complement (object), or adjunct. Goatly illustrates how a marked theme is used for showing symbolic aims. for example,

“On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble. His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves. The gale, it plies the saplings double. And thick on Severn snow the leaves” (p. 19).

Underlined words are the marked theme. The two underlined words are the subjects. In the first sentence, the marked theme is a circumstantial adjunct. The second, marked theme is the object. In the third, marked theme occurs before it (subject). While in the fourth sentence, there are three marked themes adjunct (thick), adjunct (on severn), and verb (snow) before the subject.

Goatly (2021, p. 23) shows the marked themes by identifying adjunct place (here, there), adjunct adjective (far, still, sick, high), preposition (in, on, from, through, by, with), and adjunct time (now, then, today). These items occurred frequently in an initial position of the marked theme. Metaphors reveal an idea or a comparison, it states one thing (target) that it is another thing (source). The up-down orientation can be linked to the conceptual metaphor (health/life is high) such as, stand up to, support, life and (unhealthy/dead is low) such as fall sick, run down lay you low. For example,

“He supported his family by working as a taxi driver” (Goatly, 2021, p. 21).

Moreover, Goatly (2021) asserts that this poem depends on conceptual metaphor (similarity is proximity) and (the difference is distance). As an example,

“There pass the careless people…. Here by the road I loiter” (p. 27).

There refers to a group of people distant from the poems of the speaker. While here indicates proximity to the speaker. To conclude, Goatly presents an analysis in detail of Housman's poem by focusing on the marked theme and conceptual metaphor, especially those with place and direction semantics. Place and direction adjuncts are the most important categories of marked theme and explain the semantic areas in conceptual metaphors or symbols in the selected text.

3.3 Wales's (2017) Study

Pictures from Italy (1846) is a non-fiction travelogue by Charles Dickens. There was very little extended analysis or linguistic analysis of these works (e.g travelogue) as a literary text. Wales (2017) is
interested in the role of analogy in Pictures from Italy. She emphasizes the central role of analogy in the text including broadly the following devices: similes (like, as), quasi-similes (as if), and comparisons. In this work, she asserts that the analogies are defined as explicit mapping through conceptual domains in cognitive terms.

Wales (2017) uses analogy since it gives interesting possibilities to further explore travel trips. She aims at revealing the worldview and the animate transformed into inanimate and vice versa. Accordingly, the detected analogies have a necessary and significant role in the linguistic texture. The main point is that Dicken's beliefs and illusions are similar to Italy images which consist of worlds fit with the real experience. The analogies are presenting possibilities for further investigation of linking the tourism discourse with travelogues in general.

She believes that the title indicates an obvious resemblance with a painting since it is regarded as a frame in an objective sense (Wales, 2017). Hence, “the analogy is a mapping of knowledge from one domain to another” (Gentner, D. & Gentner, D. R. 1993, p. 448). Wales (2017) believes that metaphor may exist, but she is only interested in explicit analogies rather than metaphor. The most important idea here, the way she treats analogy linguistically.

Wales (2017) suggests four groups of analogies in her analysis, each group has different effects, functions, and more significantly, a reader-help degree. To begin with, she focuses on the negative forms like: Nothing, Neither, Never, and NO. For example, “No prospect can be more diversified and lovely than the changing views of the harbour” (Dickens, 1846, p. 596). Also, she concentrates on the comparative forms: er, more, and then. For instance, "No prospect can be more diversified and lovely than the changing views of the harbour" (Dickens, 1846, p.596). In addition, Wales emphasizes on the superlative forms: est and most, as in "[The view over the sea] affords one of the most fascinating and delightful prospects in the world" (p.607).

In addition, the analogies occur more in harmony with subjective imagery. As a result, Wales (2017) is interested in phantasmagoria. As an example, “the walls of the city look like the entrance to Vauxhall Gardens on a sunny day” (Dickens, 1846, p. 593). The phantasmagoria, in the above example, is used for magic with supernatural illusions (OED, 1802f). Dickens introduces Italy as “like a chaotic magic lantern show” (Flint, 1998).

The analogies can be regarded as part of Dickens's stylistic idiolect; here, the analogy is essentially Dickensian. The analogies of like and as if show a bad worldview. The form of analogy like as if clauses indicate to the unreal world, fiction world, or un-familiar world (Goatly, 1997). The analogies are transformed from a visible source into the exotic: the reality into illusions, and the illusions into reality. To form the scene in the terms of Dickens, the use of visual images is very significant for the reader’s comprehension (Wales, 2017). For instance: like parasite vermin, as if they were afflicted with a cutaneous disorder (Dickens, 1846, p. 593).

Many of analogies, in their semantic prosody, are negative forms, it is the process of mapping that can be noted in the following examples:

(1) “The passages more squalid and more close than any in St Giles’, or old Paris”

(Dickens, 1846, p. 590).
“a most enormous room with a vaulted roof and whitewashed walls; not unlike a great Methodist chapel” (Dickens, 1846, p. 560).

Again, Wales (2017) emphasizes the negatives, comparatives, and superlatives through the use of analogies. The analogies are metonymic rather than metaphorical. In terms of the text world theory (TWT) and through the principle of minimal departure (Gavins, 2007), the link between textual worlds and the world outside of the text is studied. In other words, the main idea in fiction theory is the link between the imaginary worlds of fiction and the real worlds in which we live. Accordingly, Wales (2017) asserts that Dickens compares what we know about our life with the new to comprehend it and create common ground, both metaphorically and literary. She believes that when people travel, it is natural to link the familiar with the unfamiliar, so the physical world of Italy and Genoa is considered as mapped to the England and London physical world (Wales, 2017). For instance, “I am half afraid to write the word – like LONDON!!” (Dickens, 1846, p. 651).

In Pictures from Italy, the analogies are more understandable and acceptable since they work very well. The views are explained more easily in order to comprehend them, and the images in the reader’s mind can be readily created (Wales, 2017). To conclude, Wales chooses a Picture from Italy since it shows the kind of travelogue literature and gives different forms of analogy. She focuses on moving from reality to fiction and vice versa. She is concerned with what she sees as an important role of analogy in the work.

3.4 Zurru (2017)

Zurru (2017) reveals the scope, aims, and methodological ways of ecostylistics with a concentration on the background of stylistics, ecolinguistics, and ecocriticism. The theoretical and methodological frameworks of ecostylistics are applied to the analysis of The Hungry Tide (THT) novel by Amitav Ghosh (2005). Ecostylistics serves as a functional tool used by Zurru to spotlight the power hierarchy constructed in the three selected extracts from the novel between humans and nonhumans by using SFG. This notion indicates “any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental set” (i.e. mind style). It is linked either with the linguistic options made by an author to produce character's worldview (Fowler, 1977), a particular narrative standpoint, or with the stylistic effects, for instance, a character or landscape description by Leech and Short (2007).

She aims to both extend and strengthen the issues of ecostylistics by showing an ecostylistic analysis in a literary text and concentrating on an ecological rather than environmental studies by evaluating and analyzing the link between human and nonhuman entities in the texts selected. Zurru (2017) combines ecostylistic investigations of linguistic choices and Systemic Functional analysis of the relations that exist between participants in the analysis of the texts. Therefore, the analysis of ecostylistics of the three extracts aims to identify the link built between the physical landscape (e.g. rivers, tides and the linguistic selects in the study) and humans existing in the texts.

Zurru (2017) utilizes the processes type and agency and the way to retract between them in SFG. These two systems interact within a transitivity system which is linked to the ideational function of language because it interprets how the speaker represents their experience of reality in the sentence by a group of processes. The transitivity system presents lexicogrammatical resources for interpreting the
change amount in the flow of events as a figure and as a composition of the elements centered on a process. Processes are organized into a controllable group of process types (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Halliday, 1985). Each process Type (e.g. process of sensing, the process of doing and happening, material) is linked to the participants (e.g. phenomenon and senser in mental processes, actor and goal in material processes). The analysis combines ecostylistics with both transitive and ergative models to investigate the relationship between human and nonhuman participants in the texts and what mental style they exhibit (Zurru, 2017). The ergative analysis considers the ideational metafunction, but not like the way of transitivity. Transitivity enables the person to identify the experiences as discrete units (e.g. the way experience is revealed as a process), while ergative analysis enables the person to identify the experience as a whole (e.g. taking causation as the main principle). Ergative analysis helps the researchers to identify who is the agent in the selected texts depending on whether the process is active, passive, or middle. It also helps to identify if the agent is present, absent, or hidden (Zurru, 2017).

Zurru (2017) uses different linguistic choices to analyze the texts at linguistic, stylistic, and narratological levels (mind style). At the linguistic level, she uses SFG, reference, metaphor, ellipses, and comparison. She uses foregrounding (Douthwaite, 2000 ) and personification in the stylistic analysis. While in the narratological level, she focuses on either internal focalization or external focalization. In this context, mind style is a realization of a narrative point of view. Even more specifically, mind style can be connected to very specific stylistic effects, such as how a character or a place is described. The focus here is mostly on cumulative trends of stylistic choice. To the extent that a writer's depiction of the universe departs from a common-sense interpretation of reality, the necessity to distinguish between the fictional world and mind style becomes more clear (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 151).

To conclude, Zurru’s (2017) analysis of THT is presented linguistic evidence to emphasize in two-point, the Sundarbans and presenting it as a character in the novel, and the ecocritical claims of the agency of the tideland in THT. She uses different methodologies for the analysis of the novel. The study focuses on the roles played by environmental entities (e.g. nonhumans). She concludes that the Sundarbans as an ecosystem, the ecosystem is a geographic area where the organisms (plants, animals, and others) interact together to make life as a circle (Zurru, 2017).

3.5 Jaafar and Adnan (2023forthcoming)

Finally, Jaafar and Adnan (2023forthcoming) conducted an ecostylistic analysis of selected excerpts from Michael Punke's novel The Revenant (2002). The study's objectives are accomplished through the use of an eclectic methodological approach. The study intends to uncover the power hierarchy established in the selected texts between human and non-human individuals. It also seeks to demonstrate how natural elements affect human survival in a fictitious setting by detecting ecostylistic aspects in the literary text. Furthermore, the study presents a qualitative investigation of stylistic elements such as foregrounded features and deviated language patterns. As a result, performing an ecostylistic analysis

Conclusion

After explaining the aforementioned previous studies, it is necessary to identify the differences and similarities between them and the current study. This study presented a review of diverse stylistic perspectives on landscape, place, and the environment, through the analysis of various types of texts such as poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose, newspaper articles, building names, online texts, and exhibitions.
Using established and innovative methodologies from corpus linguistics, metaphor studies, text world theory, and ecostylistics. Thus this paper provides an overview of how these themes are expressed and can be explored in literary and non-literary discourse by the scholars. The studies compiled demonstrate the need for a "stylistics of landscape" that highlights how spaces are linguistically represented, a "stylistics of place" that focuses on the discursive and emotional qualities of those spaces, and a "stylistics of environment" that stresses the importance of environmentally responsible humanities that support a shift away from an anthropocentric narrative that prioritizes humans above other animals and the environment.

References


