Journal of ELT and Education
p-ISSN: 2618-1290, e-ISSN: 2663-1482, Volume 7, Issue 3, Page: 50-56
Published by, Center for Academic Research and Development (CARD)

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13292423

Toward a greener tomorrow: An eco-critical discourse analysis of grade five EFL textbook taught in Bangladesh

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[**Citation:** Onee, K. A., Hasan, M. N., & Reza, M. M. (2024). Toward a greener tomorrow: An eco-critical discourse analysis of grade five EFL textbook taught in Bangladesh. *Journal of ELT and Education*, *7*(3), 50-56.]

Abstract: Bangladesh faced several alarming consequences of climate change, with frequent occurrences of floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones, and other natural disasters. To mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, it is important to make young learners eco-conscious and include eco-friendly content in textbooks. Thus, the present research aimed to conduct an eco-critical discourse analysis of the grade five EFL textbook taught in Bangladesh. The qualitative study incorporated the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model by Fairclough (2013) and the framework of ecolinguistics by Stibbe (2015) as its theoretical underpinnings. The study's findings revealed that the discourses of the textbook were significantly ambivalent, only partially addressing the ecosophy of the analyst.

Keywords: EFL, ecosophy, ecolinguistics, CDA, ECDA, climate change

Introduction

Humans' ignorant and inconsiderate actions have exploited nature in several ways, including the acceleration of climate change, which in turn has induced different natural disasters, like floods, droughts, and cyclones (Islam et al., 2021). Moreover, this eco-vulnerability resulting from climate change will likely be accentuated in the future (Driga & Drigas, 2019). Thus, creating environmental awareness is highly significant, especially in making the new generation aware of the dangerous consequences of environmental exploitation, and providing them with environmental education is crucial (Mbah et al., 2022). English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) textbooks can be pivotal in achieving this purpose since language and ecology are interconnected. To elaborate, our beliefs and conceptions influence our actions toward the environment and what we believe in and conceptualize are moulded by the language we use (Stibbe, 2015). So, including content related to ecological awareness in EFL textbooks can motivate learners to adopt and promote eco-friendly lifestyles (Yastibas, 2020). Therefore, the study's general objective was to conduct an eco-critical discourse analysis of the EFL textbook taught in grade five in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study were (i) to eco-critically analyze environmental discourses of the *English For Today* textbook of grade five at formal (micro), discursive (meso), and societal (macro) levels; and (ii) to discover the underlying ecosophies of the environmental discourses of the textbook.

Theoretical Framework

The current study considered Stibbe's (2015) framework of ecolinguistics that connected people's perceptions about and actions towards the environment through different types of stories; the everyday discourses. Stibbe (2015) discussed eight different types of stories in his framework of ecolinguistics.

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After identifying the particular type of story, its ecosophy (ecological philosophy) is unveiled. Stibbe (2015) mentioned that discourses that go against the ecosophy of the analyst are referred to as destructive discourses. As opposed to it, the ones that adhere to the ecosophy of the analyst are called beneficial discourses, and discourses carrying messages that only partially support the ecosophy of the analyst are ambivalent discourses.

The ecosophy of the study's researcher is to value all living beings and non-living natural entities of the environment for their own sake and the collective well-being of all. Here, well-being does not refer to instant gratification but sustainable welfare by solving crises like climate change.

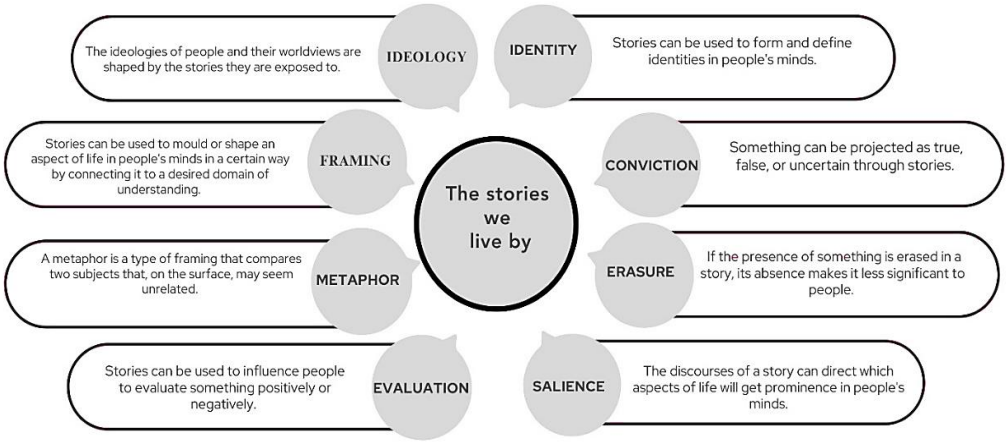


Figure 1. Framework of Ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015)

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model by Fairclough (2013) analyzed language to unveil different power dynamics of the society. This model has three dimensions. The first stage is description that involves the analysis of the formal properties of language. The second stage is interpretation that analyzes the correlation between text and interaction. Discursive practices are analyzed in this stage. Finally, the explanation dimension connects interaction with social context.

Literature Review

This research dealt with the eco-critical discourse analysis (henceforth, ECDA) of EFL textbooks, addressing the issue from various perspectives. Afrin and Saha (2023) ecocritically studied EFL textbooks taught in grades 6, 7, and 8 in Bangladesh and found that environment-related topics are average in proportion in the textbooks. They suggested that considering the gravity of the ecological crisis in the country, such contents deserve more attention. Similarly, Triyono et al. (2023) revealed in their research that the 12th-grade EFL textbooks taught in Indonesia should include more green educational concepts for thorough ecological input for the learners.

Iqbal and Lohar (2023), in their study on the Pakistani English language textbooks of grades six to ten, revealed that although the books mainly promote environmental awareness, anthropocentrism can be traced in them. Regarding this, Xiong (2014) suggested that anthropocentrism should be avoided and that an in-depth discussion of ecological issues should be included in the EFL textbooks. In a study conducted on the secondary level EFL textbooks taught in public schools in Brazil, Cristovão et al. (2022) revealed that environmental issues were presented only at a surface level in the textbooks. Al-Jamal and Al-Omari (2014) also came up with similar findings in their research on 10th-grade EFL textbooks taught in Jordan, disclosing that "think green" is not highlighted by Jordanian EFL textbooks. Conversely, the study conducted by Ma (2023) on Chinese primary school language textbooks disclosed the promotion of ecological awareness and the empowerment of animals in the books significantly. Similarly, Hookoomsing and Oozeerally (2021), in their eco-critical analysis of

two Grade 3 literacy stories of a Mauritian English book, found the discourses to be eco-beneficial, which can help primary school children achieve ecological awareness at a very young age. Although different research works on the ECDA of English language textbooks already exist, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has yet been conducted on the ECDA of EFL textbook taught in grade five in Bangladesh that combines Fairclough's (2013) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Stibbe's (2015) model of ecolinguistics.

Methodology

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, which refers to an in-depth descriptive analysis of data rather than a numeric analysis (Cresswell, 2017), which was suitable for this study.

Corpus of the Study

The *English For Today* textbook taught in grade five, published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board of Bangladesh (NCTB), was selected purposively for the research since it is vital to make the young learners eco-conscious (Roe et al., 2023) and educate them about ecofriendly actions from the elementary level (Sukma et al., 2020).

Data Analysis Procedure

Environment-related excerpts in the *English For Today* textbook for class five have been identified through content analysis. Then, the researcher read and reread the selected excerpts for inductive thematic coding; a bottom-up process of categorizing qualitative data (Cresswell, 2017). Afterwards, the discourses under each theme were ecocritically analyzed using the CDA model by Fairclough (2013) and the framework of ecolinguistics by Stibbe (2015).

Analysis and Findings

Discourses on Natural Disaster in the Textbook

Bangladesh faced different natural disasters induced by climate change that have made its eco-vulnerabilities evident (Shaibur, 2017). Addressing this issue in textbooks is essential for creating awareness among learners. Unit 24 of the *English For Today* textbook of class five, titled 'Cyclone Aila', includes descriptions of what happened during and after the devastating cyclone. It projects the eco-vulnerability of the people of the coastal areas. However, a complete picture of the problem has not been portrayed, which has become evident by analyzing the grammatical processes used in the discourses of the chapter.

Table 1. Grammatical processes and their syntactic structures

Grammatical Process Type	Syntactic Structure
Action	Subject + Verb + Object (SVO)
Event	Subject + Verb (SV)
Attribution	Subject + Verb + Complement (SVC)

Note: Adapted from Fairclough (2013)

The following grammatical processes are present in unit 24 to describe Cyclone Aila- Attribution (SVC): "Everyone was afraid" (p. 95).

Event (SV): "…the river was rising" (p. 95).

Here, what makes the event and attribution-based grammatical processes problematic for narrating Cyclone Aila is that, unlike action-based grammatical processes (SVO), they do not create an agent-patient relationship clarifying the agents (humans) responsible for the problem (climate change-induced cyclone).

Furthermore, the action-based grammatical processes (SVO) with inanimate agents do not facilitate an understanding of how human actions are responsible for climate change leading to natural disasters. For instance, in the same unit, the following excerpt has been mentioned,

"The winds of Cyclone Aila shook the walls of the house…" (p. 95).

This type of discourse makes natural disasters seem to be incidents that "happen" and are not "caused." However, natural disasters are not accidental. Humans' exploitation of nature results in climate change, which triggers cyclones in Bangladesh (Kabir, 2016).

Nevertheless, some action-based grammatical processes (SVO) with animate agents (humans) are present in unit 24. For instance,

"His grandparents checked the family's emergency kit" (p. 95).

"They put the torch, batteries and first aid kit in plastic box" (p. 95).

"…people worked together" (p. 96).

"…people repaired their homes…" (p. 96).

"They planted new trees and new crops…" (p. 96).

But, these descriptions only highlight what people need to do to be safe during a disaster and how to recover from its damages. These are essential lessons, but such narratives do not indicate how people can reduce the risk of disasters by taking responsibility and refraining from eco-destructive actions. So, the syntactic structures only describe people's experiences during and after Aila. The preventive stage is missing.

Moreover, climate change is not mentioned once in the chapter, which creates a void in the narration. Such discourses are called stories of erasure, where the absence of someone or something shifts people's attention away, making the issue less significant (Stibbe, 2015).

Unit 23, titled "Stay Safe!" is also about different natural disasters where earthquakes, cyclones, tsunami, and river erosion are mentioned. It is vital to notice the discourse participants and subject matter here. The discourse participants are two children and an officer from the fire service and civil defense department. The subject matter is disaster management and safety measures. Here, the officer talks about cyclones, river erosion, earthquakes, and the unpredictable nature of the latter. He says,

"You shouldn't worry much. We can prepare for natural disasters. Here is a leaflet" (p. 91).

Here, although the discourse's responsible authority (the officer) uses modality (should, can) to advise that there is not much to worry about, he limits the disaster preparedness discourse to keeping torch, first-aid kits, and food ready. However, there is a lot more that humans can do to bring sustainable solutions to environmental problems (Ronan & Towers, 2014). Not mentioning human responsibilities for mitigating and preventing disasters in the long run, giving no clue about climate change-induced natural disasters, and not suggesting any sustainable solutions to natural disasters create a void in the discourse, making it a story of erasure (Stibbe, 2015).

Overall, the discourses on natural disasters in the textbook represent stories of erasure having ambivalent ecosophy, meaning they include beneficial narratives but only partially (Stibbe, 2015).

Discourses on Tourism

Teaching young learners to care about the environment and educate them on eco-tourism is significant. Unit 12 of the *English For Today* textbook for class five, titled "How far is Saint Martin's?" discusses tourism where Cox's bazar, Sreemangal, Madhabkundu, and Saint Martin's Island have been mentioned as some of the attractive tourist spots in Bangladesh. However, despite a direct relationship between environmental exploitation and tourism in Bangladesh (Kalam & Hossen, 2018), the responsibilities of tourists towards the environment have not been mentioned in the book. Such a narrative makes it a story of erasure where something remains unmentioned(eco-tourism), leading to ignorance (Stibbe,2015). Although the discourse appreciates nature, its preservation is not mentioned, making it an ambivalent discourse.

Discourses on Places and their Livability

Where and how people live have significant impacts on the environment. Living ignorant city life, being inconsiderate of nature, and reinforcing unplanned urbanization significantly increase climate risks (Short & Farmer, 2021).

In unit 18, titled "City and Country", a poem titled "City streets and country roads" by Eleanor Farjeon is included where city and country lives are compared. In the poem, cities are described as

having breath of the chimneys, stiff lamp-post, and, in contrast, sweet-smelling hay, trees are mentioned to describe country life. And the speaker of the poem says,

"Oh, take me away
To the country again!" (p. 70).

Stibbe (2015) addresses such discourses as stories of evaluation where something is judged positively or negatively. In the poem, living in countries near nature is evaluated positively, and cities filled with air pollution are criticized. Thus, the poem promotes an eco-friendly lifestyle, making it a beneficial discourse.

Unit 20, titled "Life Is Beautiful!" describes how a girl named Maria feels joyous smelling sweet and fresh flowers that are just outside her room, and she is pleased hearing the singing of the birds from her window. Comparing the descriptions of nature in this unit with its title, "Life Is Beautiful!" clarifies that living near the natural environment is considered pleasant, making it a beneficial discourse.

Representation of Non-human Nature in the Textbook

Encouraging learners to care about non-human nature instead of being anthropocentric is essential. Unit 21, titled "It Was a Great Day!" describes a visit to Lowachara National Park.

The leaders of a cub camporee instruct others not to make noise since "animals are frightened" (p. 83). This discourse presents a story of evaluation (Stibbe, 2015) where disturbing, intimidating animals are evaluated negatively and vice versa. This is a beneficial discourse.

In unit 10, titled "My Home District," the following have been mentioned in a discourse among three children–

"Mary can we try to catch it?
No we can't.
Well I can take a picture of it.
Oh great idea!" (p. 41).

Here, the anaphoric reference "it" refers to a butterfly. When one of the kids wants to catch the butterfly, with high modality, another kid replies, "No we can't" and further mentions that only pictures of the butterfly can be taken. So, here, a story of evaluation (Stibbe, 2015) has been presented, where trapping a butterfly has been negatively evaluated, and appreciating its beauty has been positively evaluated. Thus, the discourse is beneficial.

Stories of salience (Stibbe, 2015) are told in the discourses of the textbook through vivid descriptions of non-human animals. In unit 18, a poem titled "I meant to do my work today" by Richard Le Gallienne represents human-nature co-existence where brown bird, apple- tree, butterfly, leaves, wind, grasses, rainbow etc. have been vividly described. The speaker of the poem says,

"And all the leaves were calling me
……
And a rainbow held out its shining hand-" (p. 72).

Here, nature has been personified, and different actions like "calling," "sighing," and "held out" are performed by nature. This makes the discourse a story of salience (Stibbe, 2015), promoting beneficial ecosophy by focusing on nature and prioritizing its being.

In unit 14, the hare and the tortoise are addressed with the pronoun "he", instead of "it". Such representations are beneficial since they tell stories of salience (Stibbe, 2015), focusing on the prominence of animal lives.

Discourses on Zoo in the Textbook

In unit 3 of the grade five EFL textbook taught in Bangladesh, it has been mentioned-

"Sue is at the zoo, but she's got only one shoe!" **(**p. 13).

This excerpt presents an ambivalent discourse since discourses on zoos simultaneously represent contrasting ideas; animals taken away from their habitats and the necessity to engage animals to save

them from extinction and promote the co-existence of different species (Milstein, 2009, as cited in Stibbe, 2015).

Recommendations

1. The destructive portions of the ambivalent discourses in the textbook should be replaced with beneficial discourses since it is a form of resilience against destructive discourses (Stibbe, 2015).
2. The textbook should include action-oriented syntactic structures that explicitly mention the responsibilities of human agents towards the environment.
3. Climate change should be explicitly addressed while discussing natural disasters to understand how the former induces the latter.
4. Discourses on zoos should clearly mention if there is any valid reason behind engaging animals. For instance, saving animals from extinction could be one reason (Stibbe, 2015). Otherwise, such discourses should condemn zoos that objectify animals for amusement.
5. The discourses on tourism in the textbook should address the responsibilities of tourists towards the environment since it is significant to teach young learners about eco-tourism (Kalam & Hossen, 2018).
6. The lessons related to environmental issues in the textbook should include ecological goals and outcomes along with linguistic objectives and learning outcomes since the responsibilities of humans towards the environment should be clearly and specifically mentioned in discourses (Xiong, 2014).

Conclusion

The intensification of climate change is continually making Bangladesh more eco-vulnerable, and there is no alternative to creating eco-consciousness. Textbooks, being a mainstream form of discourse, should promote eco-beneficial discourses as they have a vast reach to the masses and hold immense potential to disseminate eco-centered messages to the target readers. Hence, EFL textbooks should be utilized to create an eco-conscious generation by incorporating beneficial ecosophies. The discourses currently present in NCTB's *English For Today* textbook for class five include beneficial discourses in different ways, such as positive evaluation of life next to nature and giving value to non-human nature. However, ambivalent ecosophy underlies most of the environmental excerpts of the textbook. Erasing humans as responsible agents contributing to natural disasters, complete omission of any discourse on climate change, incorporation of discourses on a zoo without addressing any anti-anthropocentric reasons, and not mentioning eco-tourism are some aspects that make ambivalent ecosophy prominent in the textbook. Thus, it is significant to discard eco-destructive contents (embedded in ambivalent discourses) and replace them with beneficial discourses to guide young learners towards a greener and better tomorrow.

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