

# Towards Ecolinguistic Landscaping: A Theoretical and Ecosophical Perspective

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**Keywords:** Ecolinguistic Landscape; Ecological Linguistic Landscape; Ecolinguistics; Ecosophy; Harmonious Discourse Analysis

**Abstract:** Both of linguistic landscape (LL) studies and ecolinguistics have been growing in separate ways in China and abroad in recent years, however, few LL researchers draw their attentions to the urgent global ecological crisis and address the linguistic issues therein, whereas scholars of ecolinguistics tend to approach the crisis mainly in the media with discourse analysis, overlooking the resources in public space. In an attempt to explore the possibility of an ecological linguistic landscape study, or ecolinguistic landscaping, this paper discusses its properties, together with the ecological elements and traditional Chinese ecological wisdom relevant, and tries to merge the essences of LL and ecolinguistics with an aim to propose a renewed study of ecolinguistic landscaping which embraces ecosophy to address the eco-problems in LL.

## 1. Introduction

Since the publication of Landry and Bourhis' seminal work (1997), linguistic landscape (LL) studies have been generally confined to the perspectives of sociolinguistics, translation studies and semiotics. The research focuses that have been covered are exploring the dynamics between minority language use and official language policy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2004), investigating the situation of multilingual integration and language contact (Backhaus, 2005), and probing into multilingualism in ethnic regions (Gorter, 2006), reflecting the ideological conflicts behind the language landscape (Moriarty 2014). In China, a considerable part of the empirical research on language landscapes are of a sociolinguistic nature, mostly carried out as case studies of urban or street language landscapes, such as Macau (Zhang & Zhang, 2016) and Kunming Wenming Alley (Xia & Xia, 2016). Unlike foreign countries, many Chinese scholars have studied the LL from perspectives of translation and writing of public signs, such as Yang and Ding (2014).

Parallel to the growth of LL studies, the increasingly prominent global ecological issues have spawned an ecological subfield of linguistics, namely ecolinguistics, which has been enjoying growing popularity in China in recent years (Huang, 2016). International Symposiums on Ecolinguistics have been held in China for three sessions (2016 Guangzhou, 2017 Beijing and 2018 Guiyang), with the fourth session scheduled in Denmark, 2019. The development of ecolinguistics has exerted a certain influence on linguistics, translations and other fields, but seem to be overlooked by the LL researchers. Due to this lack of attention and interaction, the theoretical development of ecolinguistics are largely ignored, let alone studies on the analysis and construction of the ecologically oriented language landscape. This paper intends to outline an ecological approach to the study of linguistic landscape, namely, ecolinguistic landscape studies, which is a new form of LL studies guided by the harmonious ecological view and aiming at solving the ecological problems in the linguistic landscapes.

Conventional linguistic landscape studies and ecolinguistics have different objectives, nature of research and theoretical resources. To construct a ecolinguistic landscape research, we must first explore the research paradigms and philosophies in order to make up for the weaknesses of the two disciplines and integrate them organically for achieving the ultimate ecological purpose.

## **2. Defining the Ecolinguistic Landscape Study: Merging Metaphorical and Non-Metaphorical Paradigms**

Language Landscape, as in Landry & Bourhis's study in 1997, was defined as "the presence of language on public and commercial signs in a particular field or region". Specifically, public facilities such as signboards, billboards, street names, place names, shop signs and the language of public signs put up by the government constitute the language landscape of a region or urban agglomeration. Alexander and Stibbe (2014) defines ecolinguistics as "the study of the relationship between language and human beings, other organisms and the natural environment, with the aim of maintaining the sustainable relationship of living organisms".

It is generally accepted that there are two approaches to ecolinguistics: the Haugen Model and the Halliday Model, which represent the metaphorical paradigm and the non-metaphorical paradigm respectively (Huang, 2016). In metaphorical paradigm, the study concerns language ecology itself, focusing on linguistic diversity, language contact, and the birth, development and extinction of language, endangered language protection, language policy planning and so on. The "non-metaphorical paradigm" focuses on the ecological examination and construction of discourse and behavior, and on the role of language (including language system, language use and language users) in ecological and environmental issues. In short, although most of the conventional LL studies are very similar to the ecolinguistic studies following the Haugen Model, they could not be termed as ecolinguistic landscape studies because they neglect the active role of language in various ecological problems as emphasized in the Halliday Model, furthermore, conventional LL studies fail to make ecological criticism or advice on the policy concerning the language landscape. Ecological LL study is the study of language landscape with an ecological orientation, which bears not only a basic task of revealing sociolinguistic ecology, but also the ecological task of examining, criticizing and advising on the reconstructing language landscape ecology by adopting certain ecosophy.

It can be said that the study of linguistic landscape under the guidance of ecolinguistics desires to incorporate both the Haugen model and Halliday model. It is not only the study of metaphorical linguistic ecology, but also carry out the non-metaphorical eco-discourse criticism. Only when the two models are unified, can it be called the study of ecolinguistic landscape. In other words, the nature of Eco-linguistic landscape research should be in line with Fill's view (2001:43), "Haugen Model" and "Halliday Model" complement each other, they are not mutually exclusive. After classifying the "ecology" of language into symbolic ecology, natural ecology, sociocultural ecology and cognitive ecology, Steffensen and Fill (2014) further argue that although the four dimensions of language have different emphasis, the environment of language is not limited to any one of them. Therefore, they propose to abandon the metaphorical and non-metaphorical distinction of language ecology and put forward the idea of expanded ecology hypothesis that tries to expand human ecology by integrating values and meanings into the ecological system, they also to try to find a "middle ground between the separation of language and ecology and the involvement of language and ecology without principles". In light of this motive, the study of Eco-linguistic landscape could provide empirical support for the development of eco-linguistics into a "unified Eco-linguistic science" in terms of unifying the metaphorical and non-metaphorical paradigm, thus having positive disciplinary significance.

## **3. Ecosophical Elements in the Study of Ecolinguistic Landscape**

The ecosophy held by the researcher is crucial to the study of ecolinguistic landscape because it determines how language users construe (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999) and story (Stibbe, 2015) all things and events in the world. In other words, ecosophy determines our understanding of the world, which influences how we view the world and ecological phenomena, and impacts our speeches and activities and our analysis, criticism and reconstruction of ecology. Viewing a certain event from individual's different ecosophies, readers may arrive at a completely different conclusion,

such as the 'Death of Parrots' (Huang & Chen, 2016). So there is a choice issue, can a researcher adopt any ecosophy as he/she pleases? What kind of ecosophy can we adopt in order to achieve the original purpose of sustaining life and ecological relationships, or in short, what can be called an "ecological" ecosophy? According to Haeckel (1995:26), four elements should be taken into account in the linguistic studies adopting the perspective of ecology: holistic, dynamic, interactive and situated. Introducing these four ecological elements into the existing toolkit of LL studies requires that the researchers should possess the following ecological view: 1) integrity. Researchers should not only pay attention to the social and linguistic environment in the study of traditional language landscape, but also consider comprehensively the natural ecological environment with language landscape as a whole; 2) dynamism. Scholars should not only pay attention to the static corpus, the corpus of a certain period, but also to the mobile corpus and the change of corpus across different periods. 3) Interactivity. Researchers should not only look at the presentation of corpus in isolation, but also study the interaction between corpus and human beings, also study the construance and deconstruction of corpus by communicative participants, and 4) situatedness. Researchers should not only pay attention to the physical location of landscape corpus but also to the ideological situation and humanistic environment of the LL location.

#### **4. Ecosophy with Chinese wisdom: From Dualism to Pluralism**

Halliday, a pioneer of the "non-metaphorical" paradigm of ecolinguistics, argues that one of the tasks of ecolinguistics is to find out and criticize the non-ecological features in the language system, such as anthropocentrism, growthism and hierarchism (Halliday, 1992). But after analyzing Larson's (2011) and Stibbe's (2015) framework of "sustainable social and ecological development", Huang and Chen (2016) believe that it is impossible and unrealistic to abandon Anthropocentrism and adopt Ecocentrism. Because the lack of the sustainable relationship of human nature and ecology means the failure of the sustainable relationship of social ecology. Huang holds that both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism originate from dualism in the tradition of western ecological philosophy, which separates man from nature and ignores the fact that man cannot live without nature and that man can impact nature. So to speak, dualism contradicts with the holistic and pluralistic ecosophy required by the sustainable relationship in the ecological system, hence it is a "non-ecological" view. In order to solve this problem, Huang advocates that the study of ecolinguistics should follow the ancient Chinese philosophy of "harmony between man and nature", be an "ecological man" and practice the ecosophy of "harmonious society" (Zhou, 2017).

Huang's ecosophy of "harmonious society" originates from the ecological wisdom of "harmony between man and nature" in Chinese Confucian and Taoist culture. It advocates "harmony but respect difference, mutual love and mutual benefit" (He & Wei, 2017), which reflects the situatedness and pluralism in the Chinese localization of western ecological theories. "Harmonious society" consists of "harmonious discourse" and "social accountability", which are inseparable. The main purpose of "harmonious discourse" is to discover, construct and promote ecologically beneficial discourses, identify and resist ecologically destructive discourses, and identify discourses with unclear ecological effects (Stibbe, 2015). "Social responsibility" comes from Halliday's (1992) appeal to arouse the ecological awareness of linguists. In dealing with ecological issues, we should not only have the naturalistic mission of promoting the harmonious and sustainable relationship between human and nature, human and other species, but also have a sense of social responsibility and promote the harmonious and sustainable relationship between people. Ecolanguage users with a sense of social responsibility, who do not tell lies, or speak boastfully, or speak vulgarly, or use any bribery language, or speak anything that destroy harmony (Huang, 2016b). In short, we should resist disharmonious language and create a harmonious social living environment between people.

#### **5. Conclusion and Prospects**

Although the study of ecolinguistics in China is gaining momentum in recent years, it is still in its infancy, and a lot of research work needs to be carried out. Conventional LL studies face

drawbacks in its theoretical basis, limited perspective, being overtly descriptive but not enough constructive, and insufficient problem solving ability, which results in its little value to the ecological reconstruction of regional LL. In view of these problems, this paper re-examines conventional LL studies' properties, discusses the ecological elements and traditional Chinese ecological wisdom relevant, and tries to merge the essences of LL and ecolinguistics, with an aim to propose a renewed study of ecolinguistic landscaping which embraces ecosophy to address the eco-problems in LL. Researchers of ecolinguistic landscape should have pluralistic and harmonious ecological consciousness, adhere to their social responsibility, care for the ecological problems involving the relationship between people and people, people and other species, people and nature, and language and ecology.

The study of ecolinguistic landscape is not only conducive to the realization of the original intention of ecolinguistics, namely to work for the benefit of natural ecology and the harmony of human society, but can also promote an ecological development of conventional LL studies, which has constructive theoretical value for the development and exchange of the two branches of linguistics. Huang (2016) put forward that both scholars and the public can "think and act ecolinguistically". This quote is especially fitting for ecolinguistic landscape studies, because it can enable scholars to observe, think and practice in real ecological settings, and putting their results under direct observation and test. In this sense, the prospects of ecolinguistic landscape study is promising.

### **Acknowledgement**

This work was part of the results of the project Towards the Ecolinguistic Landscaping in Guangdong (grant number GD17WXZ33) sponsored by the 2017 Specialized Research Fund of Foreign Languages from the Guangdong Social Sciences "13th Five-Year Plan" planning projects, P.R.China.

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