Eco-enchantment in contemporary Nature Writing: a corpus-assisted ecolinguistic perspective

Martina Russo

Università di Bologna "Alma Mater Studiorum", Bologna, Italy

Abstract

Grounded in ecological philosophy (Næss, 1975; Plumwood, 2002; Stibbe, 2021, 2022), this study is part of my ongoing PhD research project, which aims to uncover a potential "grammar of enchantment". This involves examining lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical features that foster a sense of connection with the natural world. Specifically, this study adopts a corpus-assisted ecolinguistic approach (Poole, 2022) to analyze a corpus of contemporary Nature Writing, which currently amounts to 15 books (1,432,599 tokens) published in the period between 2010-2024.

Drawing on Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal theory, the analysis examines specific linguistic choices that construct and amplify positive emotional responses to nature. It explores how feelings of wonder, joy, and care are linguistically encoded (Bednarek, 2008), looking at both explicit and implicit expressions, conveyed through lexicogrammatical choices and figurative language. More broadly, the study investigates how evaluative language, alongside rhetorical strategies, fosters a sense of reconnection with nature. It aims to identify different types of affect (e.g. high/low intensity) and look at the way in which resources of graduation influence emotional expressions. By highlighting how language can 're-enchant' our relationship with nature, this research argues that nature writing has the power to shape ecological awareness, inspire real-world engagement, and encourage a more sustainable and appreciative perspective on the environment.

References

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