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Nature Portrayed Linguistically on the Selected Ecotourism Websites of Pakistan: An Eco-critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Applying Stibbe's (2015) story framework, this study provides an eco-critical discourse analysis of nature representations on five selected ecotourism websites in Pakistan to examine their environmental beliefs. The study demonstrates the way these websites linguistically form nature-human relationships through a qualitative analysis to evaluate patterns. It focuses on the types of word choices, analogies, evaluation patterns, and overall communication related to natural habitats. Exploring the ideology underlying the appraisal pattern on particular ecotourism websites is the aim. Only five unofficial websites were included in this study, which could not accurately represent all of the content related to ecotourism in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study omitted visual components that might influence audience perceptions in favor of emphasizing only textual characteristics. Findings show that while portraying nature, these websites frequently employ positive language methods. To raise awareness of the environment, they use phrases like "pristine" and "vibrant," build living metaphors ("the mountains breathe"), and utilize inclusive vocabulary ("our natural heritage"). The tone is always one of adoration and awe, presenting nature as valuable and worthy of preservation. As to the study, more open communication that achieves a balance between actual environmental claims and promotional objectives could be beneficial for website makers.

Keywords: *Ecolinguistics, Ecology, Appraisal Patterns, Evaluation, Ecotourism, Nature Representation, Eco-critical Discourse*

Introduction

Human perceptions of nature are influenced by language, which additionally impacts how cultures connect and interact with their surroundings. The growing interest in ecotourism around the world has made it a vital industry for sustainable growth, particularly in biodiverse areas like Pakistan. However, there is still a lack of research on the language construction of nature in digital ecotourism promotion, especially in South Asia. This study looks at how certain Pakistani ecotourism websites linguistically frame nature through an Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) lens, grabbing inspiration from Hayat et al.'s (2024) eco-linguistic analysis of Pakistani advertisements, which revealed how media narratives idealize nature as a "healing" and "essential" entity. This aligns with the work of Ali et al. (2019), who emphasized how linguistic and paralinguistic cues contribute to persuasive communication in discourse practices. According to Crystal (2011), eco-linguistics research is connected to biological and ecological research. It delves into the language as the cultural environment and language interact. Therefore, the primary objective of ecolinguistics is to investigate the discourse that demonstrates the relationship between language and the environment. Fennell (2001) highlighted a number of titles of eco-linguistics, notably linguistic ecology, which refers to the ways in which language helps to create a better atmosphere or environment, and green linguistics. Ecolinguistics, defined by Stibbe (2014), is the study of language that assists individuals in using language, which is in charge of human survival and relationships with other organisms and the physical environment—the most crucial elements for a stable and sustainable relationship that nourishes the lives of every living thing on Earth.

Ecotourism discourse requires additional research, even if Hayat et al. (2024) demonstrated how Pakistani ads commodify natural elements (such as honey and almond oil) in order to create positive ecological interactions. These platforms frequently use geographic authenticity ("Himalayan eco-lodges") and language idealization ("pristine wilderness," "untouched landscapes") to advocate travel destinations and can hide ecological degradation (Stamou & Paraskevopoulos, 2004).

Employing an eco-critical perspective, the present investigation looks at how the relationship between humans and nature has been depicted in Pakistani tourism websites, along with how these websites are constructing an ecology of environment concept. The present investigation uses the framework of functional linguistics coupled with an eco-linguistic lens to explore the relationship between humans and nature as it has been presented in the chosen Pakistani websites. By analyzing online materials, the researchers examine the framing of nature, either as one that is available to be exploited by humans, the victim of anthropogenic destruction, or the subject of conservationist projects. The paper also examines the ideological positions, power relations and tools of rhetoric that are applied in the digital media to shape environmental discourses. Similar discourse-level inquiries into rhetorical strategies and communicative roles can be found in Ali et al. (2020), who analyzed critical aspects of discourse on university websites.

Recent Pakistani scholarship reflects a growing trend in applying advanced linguistic frameworks such as Chomsky's X-bar theory to local languages like Urdu and Pashto, demonstrating structural parallels with English (Ishtiaq & Gill, 2024). This syntactic approach intersects productively with discourse studies, where ecological and critical discourse analysis frameworks have been utilized to examine themes of war, politics, and gender representation in literature and digital media (Gill et al. 2025; Gill, Ishtiaq, & Khan, 2025). Parallel studies in structural linguistics and corpus-based genre analysis reinforce the importance of identifying systemic linguistic patterns across genres, such as in political speeches (Ishtiaq et al. 2022). These investigations underscore the multidimensional role of linguistics in unpacking cultural, ideological, and communicative meanings.

It draws the eco- linguistic and the critical discourse analysis (CDA) frameworks to the consideration of vocabulary choices, metaphors, and patterns of discourses; specifically, those of Stibbe ecological discourse analysis and Fairclough three-dimensional model. This article extends our perception regarding language influencing environmental awareness in Pakistan by providing us details regarding the importance of digital media in creating ecological discourses. This paper also points to the necessity of developing a more responsible and sustainable linguistic pattern of talking about nature in online communities, revealing implicit prejudices and conceptual stigmatizing.

Research Questions

1. In what ways are the links between the human being and nature presented in the ecotourism websites based on the approach of ecolinguistics?
2. How nature is represented in the chosen ecotourism sites, as an object of the human exploitation, as a victim of degrading human exploitation, or as an object of conservational efforts?
3. Which methods of discourse are selected in the chosen websites in order to establish a sustainable and environmentally friendly image?

Literature Review

Ecolinguistics as a fast-developing field of study has created a brand name of itself as a tool under which relationships between the environment, language, and how humans interact with the environment can be considered in a critical perspective. Basically, ecolinguistics is another way that looks at the influence of language use on the perceptions and relations of people towards the environmental world (Stibbe, 2015). Due to this approach ecocritical discourse analysis (ECDA) has been developed which dwells upon scrutinizing the manifestation of ideology perspective and power balance in environmental discourse (Alexander, 2014). Largely, ECDA builds on its traditions in providing tools to assess covert and overt environmental discursive practices within varying discursive settings (Haugen, 1972) by synergizing with ecological ethics and critical discourse analysis. This discursive layering is evident in other CDA-focused work by Ali and Khan (2021), who examined metaphorical constructions in political communication.

Being guided by the ecological philosophy of equality, harmony, and symbiosis (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 4), the authors emphasize the need to use ecolinguistics to investigate and define the

role of language in the relationships with the environment. Their study demonstrates the knack of ECDA to assess discourses that are related to their ecological orientation as being either destructive (anthropocentric), ambiguous (neutral), or positive (pro-ecological). The approach is aligned with the notion mooted by Stibbe (2015) of a pushback against the stories we live by (p. 70), which reveals the manner in which language shapes ecological consciousness or anthropocentric worldviews.

Practical results have been obtained in the course of greenwashing strategies as Paltridge (2012) refers to the theories of ecolinguistics in the context of corporate and commercial language development. The ECDA of The Body Shop product descriptions published by Faiz and Waseem (2023) is an illustration of how the corporate language incorporates well-chosen metaphors, including phrases such as youthful bounce and replenished skin (p. 6) to conceive nature as a resource to be commercialized. Our findings align with Halliday's (2001) revolutionary study on the ways in which grammatical constructions can mask ecological agency (p. 103). This problem is especially pertinent to ecotourism discourse, as expressions such as "explore pristine landscapes" frequently deploy strategic erasure to obscure the impact of human activity on the environment (Faiz & Waseem, 2023, p. 7).

The theoretical foundations of ecolinguistics can be found in Mühlhäusler's (1996) distinction between the two main fields of study: sociolinguistic analysis and environmental studies. Critical ecolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that has been recognized by contemporary educational institutions, especially for its methodological synergy with critical discourse analysis (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006). By examining what Harré (in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006) coined "Greenspeak"—the systematic use of environmental language to promote various (sometimes conflicting) agendas—this hybrid method, which is effectively ECDA in practice, explores how environmental ideologies get naturalized through discourse.

By merging rigorous linguistic analysis of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics with environmental philosophy and ethics, current ecolinguistic research established the field of study as fundamentally multidisciplinary (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006). While Alexander and Stibbe (2011) broadened the focus to include language's role in supporting or undermining ecological sustainability, Crystal (2011) looked at this as examining the dialectic of language and environment. In his subsequent studies, Stibbe (2010) places ecolinguistics in the context of complex systems theory, highlighting how interlinked social, cultural, and economic systems both impact and are impacted by environmental words.

Recent linguistic scholarship rooted in Pakistani academia has employed diverse frameworks to examine language use across literature, grammar, and education. For instance, Arshad et al. (2024) explore the syntactic behavior of adpositional phrases in English and Urdu using Chomsky's X-bar theory. Similarly, gender representation and communicative strategies have also been examined (Ishtiaq et al. 2021)

The above collection of work demonstrates the way ECDA has evolved from its foundations in critical linguistics to become an essential tool to evaluate environmental communication in a variety of disciplines. The ecolinguistic analysis is a rapid growing research area as environmental

crises continue to intensify global wide revealing the tales people tell about nature and their real ecological impact such as corporate greenwashing or about tourism marketing. Building on this theory, the study at hand uses ECDA to ecotourism websites in Pakistan and examines whether this strategy is capable of influencing environmental-related behaviors and attitudes, through constructing language-based conceptions of nature.

Comparative Studies

ECDA has been applied in several contexts in previous research studies such as in articles that show the impact of climate change (Wang, 2018), and in texts that encourage ecotourism (Chang-Chen & Zhang, 2018). In an exploratory study of eco-friendly vision of Jiuzhaigou ecotourism literature, Chang-Chen and Zhang applied transitivity and attitude resource in order to determine that the language of harmony between man and nature prevails (p. 3). Just like this, some of the metaphors and phrases used on Pakistani ecotourism websites are likely to portray nature as shared heritage or consumable resource (Wodak, 2006).

The role of language, ecology, and tourism has been a subject of intense academic attention especially when considering the adoption of the discursive practices applied in defining the concept of sustainability and nature especially in ecotourism (Sapir, 1949). According to the analysis conducted by Faiz and Waseem (2023), the social media descriptions of the products in the Body Shop give a benchmark to look at the ways in which the companies in question can create eco-friendly images through the use of linguistic means that may often include such strategies as greenwashing (p. 1). Natural imagery, geographical authenticity (i.e. Brazilian babassu oil), and replacement of the man-made chemicals with their eco-friendly alternative, create the impression of sustainability, as dictated by their Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis (ECDA) (p. 6 7). This corresponds to the ecolinguistics model suggested by Stibbe (2015), who examined the manner in which language confirms the belief on how man is connected to the natural environment (p. 70).

These remarks play a significant role in the examination of Pakistani ecotourism websites where the use of similar discursive patterns can promote nature as a sublime phenomenon concealing environmental degradation. Similar patterns of narrative shaping and representation are explored by Ali et al. (2020), who analyzed the linguistic strategies used by private universities to attract students.

There is a growing trend towards the vitality of ecotourism as an industry that aids in ecological conservation and economic development since there has been a stronger focus on environmental sustainability at a global level (Van, 1995). Due to its scenic beauty and biodiversity, Pakistan has increasingly used digital communication platforms to market its potential attractions regarding its ecotourism opportunities (Roger, 2004). But, especially in the light of Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis (ECDA), it is still a field of poor study when it comes to the language creation of nature in a digital space. Theoretical and methodological frameworks that can be identified as significant in the study of the language representation of nature in Pakistani ecotourism websites are synthesized in the present research based on the works by Zhang et al. (2023).

Research Methodology

This research employed qualitative research methodology and was employed to conceive how Pakistani eco-tourism websites linguistically make images of the natural world based on the eco-critical discourse analysis (ECDA). Based on the notion of “stories we live by” developed by Arran Stibbe (2015) as their primary analytical instrument, the study provides a systematic technique of detecting the silent ideology of ecology existing in a speech.

Design of Research

Based on an interpretive perspective used in the study, the researchers pointed to the fact that language is not simply a self-portrait of the social and ecological reality; language is a constructive social and ecological reality. This aligns with the findings of Ali, Amin, and Khalid et al. (2020), who explored how language in Pakistani university websites constructs attractive academic realities. Such an approach corresponds to the critical vision of ecolinguistics, according to which one is to unveil the effects of discourse on a relationship between human beings and their environment (Stibbe, 2015). The method examines the linguistic properties not only on the surface but also on their deeper ecological effects since it combines elements of critical studies of discourse and textual analysis.

Data Collection

The data were gathered through purposive sampling of five famous Pakistani websites on ecotourism. These sites were selected according to the following criteria: obvious orientation on the nature-based tour, the high level of the number of visitors, the wealth of the content in English, coverage of multiple ecological zones (sea shore, northern mountains, etc.). To adhere to the digital research ethics, the publicly available data was utilized in the study, which excluded the copying of copyrighted materials and analyses integrity without fraud. The ECDA approach further provides linguistic understanding and ecological criticism to explore the nature of the ecotourism websites lingo mediation of human-environment interactions utilizing a methodical but flexible way of thinking. The methodology, common of the contemporary ecolinguistic studies, links the macro-environmental issues to the micro-level textual observation.

Data Analysis

Ecological representation and commercial imperatives involve a complex interplay in the linguistic manufacture of the ecotourism sites in Pakistani ecotourism websites and therefore, requires critical ecocritical analysis. Ali et al. (2021) highlighted similar conflicts in the use of metaphorical framing in political speeches, where rhetorical beauty obscured complex realities.

A most telling example is that, the Karakoram mountains are breathing life to our journeys giving us ancient secrets to those who can hear. This anthropomorphic metaphor is sure evidence of what Stibbe (2015) calls stories of animism within the framework of environmental discourse, a story that provides ecological systems with realistic features so as to generate powerful emotions. However, as much as personification of mountains as living rather than lifeless objects might be encouraging ecologic empathy, the question an ecocritical reader must ask is whether this is a trick used to sell the landscape out to tourists. This poeticized use of mountains as the place where nature is whispering secrets to people in a poeticized version of the wilderness can

conceal the real environmental threats to which these pristine alpine ecosystems are exposed due to climatic change and increasing tourist pressure.

The other notable discursive motif that catches the eye is the extensive purity vocabulary such that one can even find the phrases as- "traverse the undefiled valleys of Hunza where time has not taken a toll." The conscious use of words such as pristine and unspoilt can be referred to as a deliberate utilization of the environmentalist term known as the wilderness myth, and it is an ideological construction that identifies certain landscapes as immobile unchanged Edens that predate historical figures of humankind. When directed against places such as the Hunza Valley, where, in fact, human cultivation and arts of culture have radically transformed the landscape over hundreds of years, this rhetoric of primordial purity is especially dangerous ecocritically speaking. Does this guardian language reflect the decision-making power and the agreement to share the benefits or is it a romanticization of the local communities with support of the existing power structure in the tourism industry? The fact that such declarations do not contain specific information on property rights, revenue sharing or conservation governing questions raises critical questions on the gap between symbolic recognition and actual community involvement. The second remarkable discourse pattern is spiritual register as the author uses the term when describing the forests of Swat as cathedrals of biodiversity where each leaf prays to be salvaged. By alluding to religious symbols (cathedrals, prays), this eco-theological jargon can sacralize the landscape according to the demands of the local culture, as well as to the needs of the tourists who visit the country. Ecocritically speaking though, with the discussion of a green religion in the functional sense entertained by Taylor (2010), we must ask whether this form of spiritual dressing actually leads to real preservation practices or merely acts as some type of ornate trim. Using the term "cathedrals" to describe woods merely adds poetic flair to promotional materials, or does it genuinely encourage more responsible tourism and stronger environmental protections?

Claims about sustainability like "Our eco-lodges harmonize with nature, leaving no trace but memories" *are prime examples of what has been dubbed "green language"* in terms of tourism. Harmonization and no trace using the language of deep ecology and leave no trace ideals provide a picture of smooth environmental integration. Nevertheless, considering the Stibbes (2015) study of greenwashing, ecocritical work would add information about the ecological surveillance, waste disposal, energy infrastructure which is rather absent in such emotional statements. As one can see in the conflict between these statements of aspiration and the absence of concrete information, the challenge of communication in business organizations regarding sustainability is extremely difficult.

Finally, the site explains the language of all-inclusiveness like the phrase "Become part of saving these landscapes - your trip furthers local conservation efforts" to be synthetic personalization and talks about collective pronouns ("us," "your") to give an impression of collectivity. Ecocritical perspective must take into account whether such discursive practice adequately grounds the complex realities on the ground of conservation funding, despite possible visitor satisfaction and participation levels. Does this language make the true value of tourism dollars on conservation

to be exaggerated? Does this conceal the need to have more systemic fundraising machinery than those dependent upon consumers as donors?

Through this detailed ecocritical analysis of discourse, we see the way in which a rich linguistic repertoire that involves, among other things, scientific lingo, poetic metaphor and ethical plea forms the hallmark of Pakistani ecotourism websites that present stimulating stories on the environment. Significant conflicts are also shown by the investigation, though, when claims outweigh evidence, complex socio-environmental interactions are reduced for marketing goals, and commercial representation seems to overshadow ecological reality. This analysis emphasizes how crucial it is to keep a critical viewpoint, even—possibly especially—when encountering language that appears to be the most thoughtful and environmentally conscious. Ecocriticism serves as a reminder that the narratives we tell about nature have significant tangible effects on how we regard, utilize, and preserve the natural environment.

Discussion

Pakistani ecotourism websites use a deliberate linguistic repertoire that portrays nature as a sustainable tourism product and a pristine paradise, according to the report. The reinforcement of an environmentally conscious picture is evident through the constant use of organic imagery (breathing life to mountains), the importance of words (considerations of using words such as pristine and unspoiled), and the appraising tones of the language (thriving havens), which reflects on the minds of the environment conscious individuals. The ecocritical approach unveils contradictions of these representations, however, since the language stresses ideas of conservation, but often obscures ecological damage and commercialization by means of active obscuring and idealization. Spirituality and awe surround the representation of nature, but there are neither any actual safeguards taken towards protecting the nature nor there is great expectation towards nature itself. Similarly, inclusive pronouns ("join us") reduce environmental burden of the industry and give the impression of mutual accountability. What is on one hand is the necessity to sell nature as an attraction in an attempt to preserve the nature, which is a broader conflict of ones in ecotourism discourse that finds a reflection in this dichotomy. This contradiction between commercialism and communicative intent has also been explored in discursive analyses of institutional promotions in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2020). The findings reflect Stibbe (2015) argument that language shapes ecological thinking, yet they also attest how, at least when detached of actual, verifiable actions towards sustainability, language itself can shade into promoting the greenwashing effect even when presented with a pro-environmental discourse.

Conclusion

This research highlights the effect of language regarding the perception of people on nature in Pakistani ecotourism. The argument, more often than not, focuses on the aesthetic and economic attractiveness more than it does on environmental responsibility, although the websites are effective in employing metaphors, wording, and scoring trends to develop positive environmental attitudes. This analysis shows that as much as linguistic tools are used to promote tourism with conservation interests, they are also exposed to its danger of poetic abstraction

and selective reporting by hiding unsustainable realities. In the long-term perspective, tourism communication must have a balance between objective ecological facts and inspirational narrative chats with the understanding that nature is beautiful and the necessity to maintain it has become urgent. Rather than advocating performative sustainability the industry should advocate genuine eco-awareness through a language that is more sincere and candid. This conclusion reflects the concerns raised by Ali et al. (2022), who emphasized teachers' role in addressing literacy skill gaps through effective communication strategies in schools. The study contributes to the development of the field of ecolinguistics since it shows how an ecocritical approach to text analysis could be used to indicate the benefits and drawbacks of environmental depiction in online media.

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