



Sune Vork Steffensen, Martin Döring, Stephen J. Cowley (eds.), *Language as an Ecological Phenomenon: Language and Bioecologies in Human–Environment Relationships*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2024.

Language as an Ecological Phenomenon: Language and Bioecologies in Human–Environment Relationships, edited by Sune Vork Steffensen, Martin Döring, and Stephen J. Cowley, was published in 2024 by Bloomsbury Academic as part of the *Bloomsbury Advances in Ecolinguistics* series. This edited volume represents a theoretically ambitious and interdisciplinary contribution to ecolinguistics, aiming to reconceptualize the field by shifting its focus from language as an “abstract representational system” toward *language* as an “embodied, ecological, and relational process” embedded in living systems. The editors and contributors argue that traditional linguistic approaches have insufficiently accounted for the ecological embeddedness of linguistic activity and that ecolinguistics must therefore be reoriented toward understanding language as an integral component of bioecological processes.

The volume opens with the introductory chapter, “Ecolinguistics: Living and Language United” (pp. 1–26), written by the editors Sune Vork Steffensen, Martin Döring, and Stephen J. Cowley, which establishes the conceptual foundation for the entire collection. In this chapter, the editors argue that ecolinguistics must move beyond viewing language as a symbolic system used to represent reality and, instead, conceptualize *language* as a form of ecological coordination embedded in living systems. They emphasize that linguistic activity is inseparable from ecological processes, and has material consequences for both human and non-human life. By situating language within ecological and biological processes, the editors challenge traditional representational models of language, proposing a theoretical framework that foregrounds ecological entanglement, embodiment, and relationality as central to linguistic inquiry.

In the first part of the volume, titled “Energizing Ecolinguistics”, the theoretical reorientation proposed in the introduction is further developed in Leonie Cornips’s chapter, “How (Dairy) Cows and Humans Intertwine Language Practices” (pp. 29–53), which explores communicative interactions between humans and dairy cows in agricultural contexts. Through an autoethnographic analysis of vocalizations and interactional patterns, Cornips demonstrates that cows actively participate in communicative processes and should be understood as agents engaged in *language* rather than as passive objects of human communication. By documenting how communicative meaning emerges from interspecies interaction, this chapter challenges anthropocentric assumptions and expands ecolinguistics to in-

clude non-human communicative agents, thereby reinforcing the ecological and relational nature of *linguaging*.

The ecological and cognitive dimensions of *linguaging* are further examined in the chapter “Ecolinguistics and the Cognitive Ecology of Global Warming” (pp. 55–81) by Sune Vork Steffensen and Edward Baggs, which addresses climate change as a phenomenon that cannot be adequately understood through traditional representational models of language. The authors argue that ecolinguistics must focus on how *linguaging* shapes perception, cognition, and action in relation to ecological phenomena. By emphasizing embodied experience and temporal awareness, they demonstrate that linguistic practices influence how individuals and societies perceive and respond to climate change, highlighting the ecological consequences of linguistic activity.

The theoretical implications of this ecological perspective are further elaborated in Stephen J. Cowley’s chapter, “Regeneration: From Language Use to Linguaging” (pp. 83–105), which argues for a fundamental shift from viewing language as a representational system to understanding *linguaging* as an ecological and embodied process. Cowley critiques traditional linguistic theories that treat language as an abstract system located in individual minds and instead proposes that linguistic activity emerges from ecological interactions, social practices, and material conditions. In this view, *linguaging* becomes a relational process that connects organisms, environments, and social systems, thereby shaping ecological and social realities.

Alexander Kravchenko’s chapter, “The Epistemological Conundrum of Language: Humans as Ecologically Special and Ecologically Destructive” (pp. 107–126), further develops this ecological perspective by examining the role of *linguaging* in human ecological adaptation and destruction. Kravchenko argues that *linguaging* is a biological adaptation that enables humans to coordinate complex social interactions and construct ecological niches. However, he also emphasizes that *linguaging* has facilitated environmentally destructive practices, highlighting the need to rethink human linguistic and ecological relationships. By situating language within biological and ecological processes, this chapter challenges the traditional separation between nature and culture, emphasizing the ecological responsibility inherent in linguistic activity.

The theoretical exploration of ecolinguistics continues in Rasmus Gahrn-Andersen’s chapter, “Varieties of Expression and Enlanguage Cognition in the Context of a Radicalized Ecolinguistics” (pp. 127–144), which critically examines existing ecolinguistic theories and their reliance on traditional linguistic assumptions. Gahrn-Andersen argues that meaning-making cannot be understood as an internal cognitive process but must instead be viewed as emerging from ecological and social interactions. His analysis contributes to the development of an ecological and relational understanding of language, reinforcing the volume’s broader critique of representational linguistic models.

The second half of the volume, titled “From Discourse to Worldly Action”, demonstrates the practical implications of this theoretical framework. Arran Stibbe’s chapter, “Ecolinguistics for Ethical Leadership” (pp. 147–167), examines the role of *linguaging* in shaping ethical leadership and ecological responsibility. Stibbe argues that linguistic practices, particularly storytelling, play a crucial role in shaping ecological values and guiding social action. By emphasizing the importance of narrative in constructing ecological awareness, he demonstrates how ecolinguistics can contribute to the development of ethical leadership practices grounded in ecological sustainability.

The ecological and ethical implications of *linguaging* are further explored in “Landscape Sentience” (pp. 169–190) by Elizabeth Oriel, Deepta Sateesh, and Amal Dissanayaka, which examines the relationships formed between humans and elephants in South Asia. The authors argue that modern governance and colonial histories have disrupted traditional ecological relationships and communicative practices between humans and non-human organisms. By emphasizing the communicative and relational nature of ecological systems, this chapter highlights the importance of recognizing landscapes and non-human beings as active participants in ecological processes.

A critical analysis of ecological discourse is provided in Alison Rotha Moore’s chapter, “Considering Cows in Australian Dairy Discourse” (pp. 191–220), which examines how public and commercial narratives represent dairy production and animal welfare. Moore demonstrates that industrial discourse often obscures ecological and ethical consequences by presenting idealized representations of dairy farming. Her ecolinguistic analysis reveals how linguistic practices shape ecological perception and social attitudes, highlighting the role of discourse in reinforcing or challenging environmentally harmful practices.

The volume concludes with Chris Sinha and Vera da Silva Sinha’s chapter, “Learning About, Learning From, Learning With: Towards a Critical Practice and Theory of Situated Language Sciences” (pp. 221–253), which examines endangered languages from an ecological perspective. The authors argue that language preservation should not focus solely on documentation but must engage with the communities and ecological contexts in which languages exist. They emphasize that languages are living ecological phenomena embedded in social and environmental systems and that linguistic research should support ecological and cultural sustainability.

Taken as a whole, *Language as an Ecological Phenomenon: Linguaging and Bioecologies in Human–Environment Relationships* represents a significant and theoretically innovative contribution to ecolinguistics. Its central strength lies in its consistent argument that language must be understood as an ecological phenomenon embedded in living systems rather than as an abstract representational structure. The volume successfully integrates theoretical reflection with empirical analysis, demonstrating the explanatory and practical potential of the concept of *linguaging*. The coherence of the collection is reinforced by the shared conceptual frame-

work that connects diverse contributions, while its interdisciplinary scope reflects the complexity of ecological challenges and the necessity of integrating linguistic, ecological, cognitive, and social perspectives.

Ultimately, this edited volume succeeds in advancing ecolinguistics both theoretically and empirically. By challenging traditional linguistic assumptions, and proposing a relational and ecological understanding of language, it provides a compelling foundation for future research. At the same time, it highlights the relevance of ecolinguistics for addressing contemporary ecological crises, demonstrating that linguistic practices not only describe, but also actively shape ecological relationships and possibilities for sustainable futures.

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