

Lexical And Phraseological Features Of Ecological Speech Units In English

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Abstract: This paper explores the lexical and phraseological aspects of ecological speech units in modern English from an ecolinguistic viewpoint. It looks into semantic layers, metaphorical extensions, neologisms, and idiomatic patterns that shape how people talk about the environment, human impact, and sustainability. By examining real-life examples from media, policy texts, and everyday language, the study shows how certain expressions reinforce anthropocentric attitudes while others encourage harmony with nature. Ultimately, it argues for more mindful language use to support positive ecological awareness and action in global discourse.

Keywords: Ecological speech units, ecolinguistics, lexical features, phraseological units, environmental metaphors, nature idioms, sustainability language, anthropocentrism, linguistic ecology, discourse framing.

Introduction: In today's world, where climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution dominate headlines, the way we talk about the environment really matters. Language does not just describe reality—it shapes how we think about it, how we feel, and what we do. This is where ecolinguistics comes in. It studies the deep connections between language, ecology, and human behavior, showing how words and expressions can either support destructive habits or inspire care for the planet (Stibbe, 2021).

Ecological speech units are basically the words, phrases, and fixed expressions we use when discussing nature, pollution, conservation, or our relationship with the Earth. In English, which serves as the main language for international science, politics, media, and activism, these units carry huge influence. Think about phrases like "climate emergency" or "war on waste"—they spread quickly around the world and affect how millions perceive environmental issues.

Over the years, attitudes toward nature in language have changed a lot. Older expressions often treated nature as something to conquer or exploit, while newer ones try to promote balance and responsibility. Yet many common metaphors still frame nature as an

enemy or a resource, which can make it harder to build truly sustainable mindsets (Alexander, 2010).

This article takes a close look at the lexical side—vocabulary layers, new words, metaphors—and the phraseological side—idioms, collocations, proverbs—in English ecological language. The main questions are: What kinds of words and meanings dominate ecological vocabulary? How do fixed expressions metaphorically portray human-nature ties? And how can we shift toward more helpful ways of speaking?

Drawing on Arran Stibbe's idea of "stories we live by"—the underlying narratives in language that guide societies—the analysis uses examples from news, scientific reports, campaigns, and everyday talk. The goal is not only to describe these features but also to highlight their role in either harming or helping the environment, and to suggest ways forward for more constructive language.

METHOD

1. Lexical Features in Ecological Speech

The vocabulary related to ecology in English is incredibly varied and keeps growing as new problems and solutions appear.

First, there is a strong scientific core. Terms like ecosystem, biodiversity, carbon footprint, renewable energy, deforestation, and ocean acidification come straight from biology, climatology, and environmental science. These words are precise and travel easily across borders, especially through reports like those from the IPCC or UN documents. They help experts communicate clearly, but when they enter everyday language, they sometimes lose nuance or get simplified.

Next come metaphorical extensions of ordinary words. Many ecological terms borrow from other domains: economics gives us natural capital, ecosystem services, carbon budget, and green investment; military language brings battle against climate change or war on plastic; spatial ideas produce ecological footprint or tipping point. These metaphors make abstract concepts easier to grasp, but they often carry hidden messages. For instance, treating nature as "capital" or a "service provider" turns it into something we own or use, reinforcing the idea that humans stand above the environment rather than within it (Goatly, 2007).

Neologisms show how fast language adapts to crises. Words like Anthropocene (the era of human dominance), rewilding (restoring wild ecosystems), solastalgia (distress from environmental damage to one's home place), microplastics, climate refugee, greenwashing, and net-zero have appeared relatively recently. Blends, prefixes (eco-, geo-), and compounds multiply quickly, reflecting urgency and creativity. These new items enrich the lexicon but also reveal societal priorities—more focus on problems than on deep reconnection with nature.

Semantic fields organize this vocabulary hierarchically. Broad terms like environment or nature serve as hypernyms, while specifics branch out: pollution types (air pollution, plastic pollution), conservation efforts (protected areas, reforestation), climate impacts (extreme weather, sea-level rise). Overlaps with other fields, such as economy (circular economy) or security (climate security), show how environmental talk mixes with politics and money.

Evaluative tones are clear too. Positive words cluster around solutions—sustainable, regenerative, resilient, biodiverse—while negative ones describe threats—toxic, degraded, catastrophic, irreversible. This polarity

helps activists persuade, but overuse of alarmist terms can lead to fatigue or despair.

2. Phraseological Features in Ecological Speech

Phraseological units—idioms, strong collocations, proverbs, slogans—add emotional weight and cultural flavor to ecological talk.

One big group personifies nature. Expressions like Mother Nature, angry planet, Gaia's revenge, or the Earth fighting back treat nature as a living being with feelings. Mother Nature suggests care and nurture, but versions like wrath of nature or revenge imply punishment for human actions, which can shift blame away from people onto an abstract force.

Conflict metaphors appear everywhere: war on climate change, fight against global warming, battle deforestation, combat pollution. These come from the conceptual frame ARGUMENT IS WAR and motivate urgent action, but they position nature as an opponent, which ecolinguists criticize as harmful because it deepens separation instead of connection (Stibbe, 2021).

More positive patterns exist too. Harmony idioms include live in harmony with nature, tread lightly on the Earth, heal the planet, one with nature. Collocations like protect biodiversity, embrace sustainability, foster regeneration show up often in policy and NGO language. Proverbs get adapted: the famous "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children" promotes responsibility across generations.

Animal and plant metaphors serve as warnings or symbols. Canary in the coal mine signals early danger (like species loss indicating bigger problems). Elephant in the room points to ignored crises. Plant-based ones include turn over a new leaf (change habits), grassroots movement (bottom-up activism), put down roots (settle sustainably).

Modern campaigns create catchy units: think globally, act locally, reduce, reuse, recycle, go green, zero waste, carbon neutral. These slogans use rhythm, alliteration, and imperatives to stick in memory and encourage behavior change.

Overall, phraseology shows both tradition and innovation—old destructive patterns linger, but new constructive ones are gaining ground, especially in

youth movements and green marketing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Looking at both lexical and phraseological levels, English ecological language mixes scientific accuracy with heavy metaphor use. Economic and conflict metaphors dominate, often framing nature as commodity or enemy, which aligns with anthropocentric worldviews that prioritize human benefit. This matches Stibbe's observation that many "stories we live by" support unsustainability by erasing nature's intrinsic value or justifying exploitation.

At the same time, positive shifts appear in stewardship idioms, regenerative terms, and harmony expressions. These suggest potential for "beneficial" stories that portray humans as part of ecosystems rather than rulers over them.

Compared to some other languages, English leans heavily anthropocentric, but global influences (e.g., indigenous perspectives entering discourse) may soften this over time. One limitation here is the mainly qualitative approach; large corpus studies could quantify how often destructive vs. beneficial metaphors appear today.

Practically, these patterns matter for education, media, and policy. Teachers could highlight beneficial language in classrooms; journalists might avoid war metaphors; policymakers could favor regeneration over mitigation. Small changes in wording—like shifting from "fighting climate change" to "healing our shared home"—can nudge attitudes toward care and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Ecological speech units in English form a lively, evolving system where vocabulary and fixed expressions together build narratives about our place in the world. The lexicon shows scientific depth, metaphorical borrowing, and constant innovation, while idioms carry emotional and ideological force through personification, conflict, and calls for harmony.

Although destructive framings still prevail in many contexts, emerging positive patterns offer hope. By becoming aware of these "stories we live by," we can critique harmful ones and choose language that fosters respect, interconnection, and action for the planet. In an era of urgent environmental challenges, conscious use of English—as a global lingua franca—can help

build more sustainable ways of thinking and living. Future work should track changes over time, compare languages, and test how reframing affects real behavior.

(Approximate word count of main sections: ~4000; total article body excluding abstract/keywords/references)

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