Implications of Terms, Concepts and Assumptions in Studying Ecocriticism and Green Study

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study how English terms and concepts have been devised for developing ecocriticism and green study. Only the social context in which language is embedded is not enough, but we should go a step ahead and study the ecological context in which societies are embedded. Therefore, it is essential to examine the way English words, terms and concepts used recurrently and widely to develop ecological discourse and to reveal hidden assumptions and hidden messages regarding the burning and serious environmental issues. The term 'ecology' is a mid-nineteenth-century coinage of Ernst Haeckel and as its Greek root oikos means 'home'. It implies the emphasis upon the holistic study of environments within which lives are intertwined. It is a 'big picture' that avoids narrow isolationism. At present, we face so many multilayered ecological crises and pressures. Thus, this paper is an honest attempt to record how English words, terms, concepts and assumptions have been devised and utilized to make an investigation of the environmental issues reflected in the different discourses and thereby develop the rapidly emerging field of ecology and its allied fields such as Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Ecofascism, Ecotheology, Ecological Socialism, Environmental Criticism, Environmental Literature, Environmental Racism, Environmental/ Ecological Ethics, Environmental Rhetoric, etc.

Key Words: Green study, ecological discourse, environmental issues, ecocriticism

Though the present age is the age of science and technology, it is also the age of ecological crises and pressures. So it is essential to study how English terms and concepts have been devised for the ecocriticism and green study. Only the social context in which language is embedded is not enough, but we should go a step ahead and study the ecological context in which societies are embedded. As John Edward puts it "the investigations of the social life of language have always

been ecologically minded" (Edward 2009: 230). Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to examine the formation and implication of English terms and concepts which are used to develop ecological discourse, some key concepts and words recurrently and widely used and to reveal hidden assumptions and hidden messages regarding these issues concerned.

The term '*ecology*' is a mid-nineteenth-century coinage of Ernst Haeckel and as its Greek root *oikos* means 'home'. It implies the emphasis upon the holistic study of environments within which lives are intertwined. It is a 'big picture' that avoids narrow isolationism. Hayward rightly calls it "the totality of relations of organisms with the external world" (Hayward 1995:26).

At present, we face such ecological crises and pressures as oil spills — toxic waste contamination — extinction of species — battle over public land use-over fishing — nuclear waste dumps — a growing hole in the ozone layer — global warming — acid rain — loss of topsoil — destruction of the tropical rain forest wildfire — poisonous gas emission — famine — flood — hurricane/storms industrialization — pollution — urbanization — overpopulation and so on.

English terms and concepts that can be used for describing these crises and pressures. They are as follows:

Terms derived from the words in other languages:

- **eco-** is derived from Greek word *oikos* which means 'home' and from ecological point of view it is an umbrella term.

- **ecology-** Etymologically, the Greek *oikos*- signifying "household" in the comprehensive sense of residence and grounds, as well as family- is the root of ecology. It has been the study of the interactions between organisms and the environment. (Buell 2006: 139-140)

- **culture-** is derived from Latin *colere* which means 'cultivate, respect, till, take care of' and in the ecological domain it is "a network of neighbourhoods or communities that is rooted and tended" (Snyder 1990:179)

- **environ-** the verb environ means "around" is of medieval provenance

- **environment-** as noun was introduced during the first third of nineteenth century to denote cultural milieu often with primary reference to physical surrounds specifically

- **environmentalism-** is a term of ethically dubious origin. It is coined to denote the view that culture and/or character is determined by environment rather than heredity.

Connotation of Word:

- **Place-** connotes not simply bounded and meaningful location but also dynamic process, including the shaping of place by outside as well as internal influences. (Agnew 1987: 28)

Word Formations:

Different word formation processes have played a very important role in developing ecological discourse and creating an ecological awareness among the learners, researchers and activists as well.

Prefixation:

- **biodiversity-** the variety of species, both flora/and fauna, contained within an ecosystem

- **biosphere/Ecosphere-** the regions of the surface and atmosphere of the earth where living organisms exist

- ecospeak - "a way of framing arguments that stops thinking and inhibits social cooperation" (Killingworth and Palmer 1992:9)

- **ecosystem-** a system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their physical environment

Suffixation:

- **anthropocentrism-** The valuation of nature only in so far as it radiates out from humankind. (Bate, 2000: 138)

- **environment-** surroundings of an individual person, a species, a society, or of life forms generally

- **environmentalism-** a movement for protecting the earth from human pollution and destruction

- **wildness/wilderness-** undomesticated

Affixation:

- **ecocentrism-** the interlinkage of the organismal and the inanimate

- **overpopulation-** overexploitation of natural resources

Compound:

- **brownfields-** particularly in inner-city areas that pose health hazards and require remediation (Shuktin and Mores 2000: 57)

- **topsoil-** the fertile, dark-coloured surface soil

- Greenspeak- a studiously neutral approach to weighing the descriptive plausibility, conceptual (in)coherence, and cultural work of metaphor in ecodiscourse: planet earth as "home", "lifeboat", and so forth (Harre, Brockmeier, and Muhlhausler 1999:91-118)

Blending:

- **eco**logy + philo**sophy**= **ecosophy**

    which means a relational understanding of selfhood "based on

    active identification with wider and wider circles of being"

    (Mathews 2001:221)

Acronyms:

- **ASLE-**Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (Critical School of Study)

- **ISLE-** Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (a new journal in 1993)

- **OSLE-** Organization for the Study of Literature and the Environment (Tinai Study Group, Madras in India)

Coinages:

- **deep ecology-** a relational understanding of selfhood "based on active identification with wider and wider circles of being" (Mathews 2001:221)

- **ecofeminism-** the view that the "twin dominations of women and nature" are artifacts of patriarchal culture instituted in antiquity (Davion, 2001)

- **ecological conscience-** Aldo Leopold coined the term to refer to "the ethics of living in accord with the welfare of the ecological community" (Leopold 1990: 340)

- **environmental equity-** refers to "the protection of environmental law".

- **environmental justice-** started in US around 1980 refers to "the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment" (Adamson, Evans and Stein 2002:4)

- **environmental racism-** coined by Benjamin Chavis, refers to "overt or subtle racism that underlies variation in the distribution of environmental burdens"

- **nature writing-** literary nonfiction that offers scientific scrutiny of the world (Buell 2006:140)

- **rain forest-** a dense forest growing in areas of very high rainfall

- **reinhabitation-** is coined in 1970s and denotes **"**learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it" (Berg and Dasmann 1977: 399)

- **Toxic discourse-** expresses "anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazards due to chemical modification by human agency" (Buell 2006: 3)

- **toxic waste-** waste material, often in chemical form

- **Umwelt-** denotes the individual organism's perceptual world

(Evernden 1985:79)

Synonymous words:

- biocentrism = ecocentrism

The view that all organisms whose interests govern the human interest

- Synonyms belong to different dialects of the language:

for example,

The terms, **'Ecocririticism'** in USA and **'Green Study'** in UK are used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and physical world around.

- Virtual synonyms for **nature writing**:

For example,

Environmental writing and **environmental literature** denote

'nonfictional prose' and 'text in any genre' respectively.

- Collocations of the Word **green:**

-- green business

-- green communication

-- green education

-- green grammar

-- green house effect

-- green lens

-- green study

Antonymous words:

The property of two words in which something is present in one

and absent in another. For example,

- brownfields á greenfields
- ecospeak á greenspeak

Polysemy

Polysemy means a word with 'many meanings'. A polysemic item will be treated as a single entry. Its different meanings are derived from one basic idea or concept. For example,

- The word **landscape** means-

    --- the appearance of an area

    --- a certain amplitude of vista

    --- an actual locale

- Raymond Williams (1983:219) identifies the word **nature** -

    --- as essential character of something

    --- as the "inherent force which directs the world

    --- as the material world including human beings

Traditional and Modern Usage:

- **Wild-** The traditional sense of the term is "unfitness for civil society" while in modern usage, an "Etiquette of Freedom"

- **Wilderness-** It is a spatial area but recently it means undisturbed land without permanent human inhabitants

Some Phrases and Assumptions underlying Ecological Theory:

- "Everything is connected to everything else."
- "Earth is not owning place, but only dwelling one."
- Revaluation of literature not in terms of ego-consciousness but eco-consciousness (Love, 1996)

At last, Moore (2004:58) questions,

"You could cut off my hand, and I would still live…

You could take out my eyes, and I would still live…

Take away the sun, and I die.

Take away the plants and animals and I die.

So why should I think of my body is more a part of me than the earth?"

Thus, this paper is an honest attempt to record how English words, terms, concepts and assumptions have been devised and utilized to make an investigation of the environmental issues reflected in the different discourses and thereby develop the rapidly emerging field of ecology and its allied fields such as ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecofascism, ecotheology, ecological socialism, environmental criticism, environmental literature, environmental racism, environmental/ecological ethics, environmental rhetoric, etc

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