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An ecolinguistic positive discourse analysis of 'Mwambu and Sella', a Bukusu oral narrative from Western Kenya

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Abstract

This study is framed in ecolinguistic positive discourse analysis, and thus uses critical discourse analysis to examine the stories of the Bukusu, a community living in Western Kenya, and classify them as positive, negative or ambivalent. Using the concept of "stories we live by", Arran Stibbe proposes nine different stories: ideologies, framing, metaphors, identity, evaluation, conviction, erasure, salience and narratives. The ecolinguist then uses their own ecosophy to rate the discourse types as positive and to be promoted, negative to be resisted, or ambivalent to be critically sorted out so that the positive elements are promoted while the negative are discarded. In this paper, I focus on two story types which have not received much scholarly attention: conviction and evaluation, and also on erasure and salience. I have used discourse-historical analysis (DHA) method to discuss findings in ecolinguistics. This oral narrative of *Mwambu and Sella* has an ambivalent ecosophy since it tends to be anthropocentric in placing human beings at the centre of the universe. However, it also ascribes agency to nature and defines the universe with personification, which has some ecocentric elements. The study contributes to the understanding of nature from indigenous worldviews which show more value for nature and demonstrate why it has been easy for the indigenous Bukusu community to co-exist peacefully and sustainably with other more-than-human occupants of the ecosphere.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, discourse analysis, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, indigenous narrative, Kenya

1. Introduction

Ecolinguistics, though relatively new as a sub-discipline of linguistics, has actually attracted

diverse research. Arran Stibbe follows a Sapir-Whorfian ideology of linguistic determinism which posits that the way we use language shapes our interactions with the environment. Alexander and Stibbe (2014, p. 105) define ecolinguistics as the study of "the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment, with a normative orientation towards protecting the systems that humans and other forms of life depend on for their well-being and survival". Stibbe (2021b) emphasises that ecolinguistics is not merely about mentioning the ecological themes in texts but what must be evident in every practical and ethical analysis of this transdisciplinary movement is "the life-sustaining relationships of humans, other species and the physical environment" (Stibbe, 2021b, p. 84). Stibbe argues that ecolinguists must analyse language and communication in real life for any underlying inequalities and unsustainability in contemporary societies (Burkette & Warhol, 2021, p. 295).

Ecolinguistics, like sociolinguistics, recognises that language is embodied in all beings, and all are embedded in larger natural systems — the complex interactions of plants, animals, and the physical environment. The claim is that linguistics, or specifically critical discourse studies, has been so focused on power relations between people, on sexism, racism and the multitude of other ways that some humans oppress other humans, that it has overlooked, or erased, something of importance. The relations of humans with other species and the physical environment are of great importance, since the continuation of all life depends on these ecological relationships (Stibbe, 2014b, p. 1).

Zhang (2022) has done a comprehensive review of publications, communities, research areas and activism events in the year 2021, which focused on the various trends of ecolinguistics. The Haugenian approach (Haugen, 1972) focuses on protecting endangered languages so as to maintain a healthy language ecology, while the approach steered by, among others, Halliday (1990) and Stibbe (2021a, b) is more concerned with analysing texts for ecological themes with a view to promoting discourses that enhance environmental protection. However, Huang and Li (2021) try to find what binds the two ecolinguistic approaches together. Since both are concerned with borrowing concepts from ecological studies and applying them within linguistics, they contend that there is no need to emphasise the differences but to consider both approaches as the same since their aim is the same: to enhance environmental protection for all beings.

In addition to ecolinguistics, I do a positive discourse analysis (PDA) that necessarily uses methods from critical discourse analysis as a starting point. The point of departure is that whereas critical discourse analysis tends to focus on exposing negative discourses, PDA focuses on highlighting that which is positive and should be emulated. Stibbe (2017, p. 1) argues that ecolinguistics has focused too much on dominant negative discourses about how the environment has been destroyed and continues to be destroyed by human beings. By using critical discourse analysis, woeful stories of consumerism, exploitation of nature, and economic discourses which focus on too much economic growth at the expense of the environment are told. Whereas it is beneficial to expose the negative discourses, Stibbe argues that alternative discourses must be sought in positive discourse

analysis, for example, discourses which promote "being more rather than having more, wellbeing rather than growth, and respecting rather than conquering nature". For Stibbe (2021b) especially, this has to do with discourses that encourage positive co-existence in the environment between humans and more-than-humans. There is a belief that indigenous worldviews have a way of conceiving nature as important in their linguistic expressions. This being the case, they are able to regard nature with the respect needed, and in the process to live sustainably with nature while benefiting from nature's resources for life sustenance but without destroying it.

In this paper, I examine the discourses of the Bukusu from Western Kenya as portrayed in a popular oral narrative. I hope to make visible any positive discourses that could have enabled a peaceful co-existence with nature, as evidenced in the words they choose in the stories they live by, to encapsulate their thoughts. I also aim to contribute to the debate about whether it is true that indigenous communities do indeed co-exist peacefully with nature. Stibbe says, "what matters is not the truth or falsity of indigenous worldviews, but the distinctive linguistic patterns that they use to, for example, ascribe personhood to animals, plants, forests, and rivers, and thereby encourage respectful and mutual relationships with them" (Stibbe, 2017, p. 11). I investigate if the Bukusu need to change the stories they live by (Korten, 2006) in order to help direct the entire course of humanity or maintain and share their existing stories to help conserve the environment better.

1.1. The Bukusu

The Bukusu (Babukusu) are a branch of the Luhya ethnic community mainly found in Western Kenya. Their land lies green, stretched out with undulating hills and valleys, and they are not far from the extensive natural Kakamega rainforest. This land is richly nourished with rain in regular seasons, though this has lately become faulty with the continuing climate change. Rainy seasons have usually been taken for granted, and when there is a problem a solution is sought from higher powers as it is believed that a pure, stable ecological state should hold. Folktales are an important source of worldviews of indigenous communities and "these are a primary cultural conduit in communities with limited access to literary or mass media networks" (Florence, 2016, p. 3). Florence (2016) decries the often negative depiction of the female gender in Bukusu folktales. Tales are recited during impressionable adolescent years, when most young people are constructing identities and worldviews. She avers that both myth and reality depict "the world as a precarious place for women, a world where women are vulnerable, fearful, and often mistreated or despised" (Florence, 2016, p. 3). Even in folklore, it is evident that man and nature have had ragged existences and relationships. A rereading of the traditional portrayal of environment in the narratives gives an opportunity to establish any good practices and ecoconsciousness in Luhya orature that can be rethought, towards preventing further unprecedented climate change.

2. Related literature

Stibbe (2017, p. 1) reviews some attempts to improve how we view the environment through linguistic analysis. There have been attempts to change the grammar of English, arguing that the grammatical structure of English hinders us from viewing the world positively. However, since it is not easy to change the structure of English, this attempt has not achieved much other than pointing out a deplorable situation and being dystopian. But I aver that there has been some achievement since it has drawn awareness of the need to choose our language structure carefully. Stibbe (2017) points out that another endeavour has been through attempting to alter the lexical usage and look for alternative words such as words which focus on *being more* rather than *having more*. Dunayer (2001, pp. 193-198) provides a glossary of terms with preferred alternatives; for example, "free-living nonhumans" should be used instead of "wildlife" to emphasise the individuality of the animals, and the more accurate terms "food industry captive" and "cow enslaver" should be used instead of "farm animal" and "dairy farmer", respectively. However, these are considered too prescriptive and judgmental towards those who do not subscribe to them.

Abram (1996, p. 68) describes how indigenous oral cultures pass on local environmental knowledge through the generations, the kind of knowledge which allows people to meet their needs without destroying the ecosystems they are part of. The linguistic patterns of an oral culture remain uniquely responsive, and responsible, to the more-than-human life-world, or bioregion, in which that culture is embedded. This is in contrast with the estrangement from nature in industrial societies, which makes us "so oblivious to the presence of other animals and the earth that our current lifestyles and activities contribute daily to the destruction of whole ecosystems" (p. 137). Indigenous oral cultures from around the world are therefore a useful potential source of beneficial discourses that positive discourse analysis can explore. As an example, Bringhurst (2008) urges us to borrow a leaf from the writings of Native Americans which regard nature positively.

> We [the Native Americans] did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as "wild". Only to the white man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land "infested" with "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame… When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the "Wild West" began. — Luther Standing Bear (Sayre, 2014, p. 82, as cited in Stibbe, 2017, p. 9)

Stibbe, (2017, p. 5) heralds as positive discourse analysis the "imaginative naturalism" of Rachel Carson (2000), Macfarlane (2013) and Goatly (2000) because their writings contain "clusters of linguistic features which come together to portray the world in ways which encourage respect and care for nature. These clusters of features draw from the standard grammar and lexicon, but arrange the words and grammatical features in ways that tell a different story about the world." Jacobs and Goatly (2000, p. 2) remind us of the German

philosopher Goethe who said, "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do." By embracing PDA, I am aware that there have been some criticisms levelled against this approach. Wodak and Chilton (2005) and Flowerdew (2008) are used to critical discourse analysis and putting those in authority on their feet by pointing out negative discourses and biases. They, therefore, urge us to be cautious while using positive discourse analysis, which points out the positive agenda, that we do not end up promoting the unfair status quo or being a source of propaganda from those in power as we try to point out the positive discourses. Thus, I critically analyse the data first (CDA) and then seek out what, if anything, is positive towards ecology.

3. Method

Martin (1999, 2004) expresses the need for positive discourse analysis within ecolinguistics (see Stibbe, 2017, p. 14). Overall, a methodology for ecolinguistic PDA consists of analysing the linguistic features of a text (or a collection of texts if looking for larger patterns) to reveal the ideologies embedded in the text. These ideologies are then compared to the analyst's personal ecosophy, and the discourse is judged positive if the stories are consistent with the principles of the ecosophy. Stibbe (2017, pp. 10-11) argues that "PDA analysis will be searching for positive discourses outside of the mainstream which are not pervasive yet, but which could offer something valuable if they were promoted to become more pervasive. PDA can therefore focus on more detailed analysis of smaller numbers of texts to reveal positive features, without the need to establish how widespread these features are at present."

Stibbe (2015) has detailed how an ecolinguistic framework can be used to analyse discourses for ecolinguistic themes. Using the concept of "stories we live by", Stibbe proposes eight different story types: ideologies, framing, metaphors, identity, evaluation, conviction, erasure, and salience; and in the 2021 revised edition (Stibbe, 2021a), he adds a ninth one: narratives. After these analyses, the researcher uses their own ecosophies to rate the stories as positive, thus needing to be encouraged and increased; negative to be resisted; and ambivalent, to be critically sorted out so that the positive is promoted while the negative is discarded. In this paper, I focus on four stories: evaluation, conviction, salience and erasure. Framing story type is the most commonly used (for instance, Gong, 2019; Ambe, 2022; Ubanako & Acha, 2022), but in this paper, I also focus on the other story types, especially conviction and evaluation, which have not received much scholarly attention.

I agree with Gong (2019) that of the nine stories Stibbe (2015, 2021a) examines, ideology can be an umbrella term for them. Nevertheless, in this paper, I focus on evaluation, conviction, erasure and salience. Conviction is a story about whether a particular description of the world is true, uncertain or false; evaluation refers to the story in which people show their judgment on what is bad and good about an area of life (Stibbe, 2015, p. 84); erasure is about backgrounding certain issues or rendering them invisible,

while salience is the opposite of this and involves highlighting or emphasising certain elements. After analysing and classifying the various story types, ecolinguists then promote the discourse for action towards conserving and improving the environment.

3.1. The data

The data are from a well-known Bukusu oral narrative that involves a young couple, Mwambu and Sella. It was collected by recall from childhood storytelling sessions whereby we would tell stories among ourselves after supper, in our grandmother's house in Lubukusu language as we awaited sleep to engulf us. This story is a folktale so I do not know when it actually began, but it is told with slight variations all around the Bukusu community. I also did document analysis by examining the story as retold in the book by Makila (1986) and the MA thesis by Musungu (2016). Since I did not tape-record the story, the analysis in this paper is based on the English translated version by Makila (1986), though summarised to leave out descriptions and repetitions common in oral narratives but not directly related to ecolinguistics. The summary of it is as follows.

> There was a devastating drought in the land which led to desperate famine. The people of Bukusuland tried all means to diagnose the cause and seek a solution. The oracle told them they must appease *Mbilimbili Nyanja,* the dragon in the ocean who had drunk up all the rain, by offering the king's only, beloved, beautiful daughter, Sella. Sella was decorated as an unwilling bride by the women and sat on a rock awaiting her consummation. However, her lover Mwambu decided to fight the dragon and rescue Sella. Eventually, the dragon died from a magical spear wound, and rain fell in torrents.

The desperate environmental disaster that unfolds in this Bukusu narrative is reminiscent of the warning cited by Goatly in his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry. Goatly (2000, p. 301) advances Wordsworth's view of nature, whereby he represents nature as an active force to be respected. Goatly argues that "to survive we had better … rethink and respeak our participation in nature before it rethinks or rejects our participation in it" (cited in Stibbe, 2017, p. 5). In this oral narrative, nature appears to have rejected human beings' participation in it and for disaster to be averted, certain drastic actions must be taken and, if necessary, sacrifices must be made.

4. Findings

The findings are hereby discussed within the PDA framework and then evaluated ecolinguistically. First, we present the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the oral narrative, and then we analyse the positive discourse analysis aspects of it.

4.1. DHA

PDA necessarily turns to CDA for linguistic tools of analysis. Therefore, I use DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) to extract the necessary linguistic features that I then analyse for positive discourses or otherwise. Details of DHA are found in Reisigl and Wodak (2009), and I will assume familiarity with the method. The DHA adheres to the socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory; therefore, the t*ext* or *discourse-immanent critique* aims at discovering inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures. The text critique of this narrative lies in the internal contradiction of the requirement for the rain to fall. The diviner had alleged, and it was boastfully affirmed by the dragon (also referred to as the ogre since it is but an imaginary creature), that for the rain to fall, Sella had to be given to the ogre. In a way, we might confirm that the king indeed did sacrifice Sella to *Mbilimbili Nyanja*. However, the ogre never managed to claim his bride and consume her (whatever that meant). There is an allusion to sexual consummation since Sella is unwillingly decorated as a bride and sent off to marry the ogre. Yet, it also seems that in the process of consuming her sexually, he would also devour her, and she would end up in his mouth. Fortunately, or unfortunately for him, Mwambu rescues Sella for himself and marries her. The ogre is destroyed by the magic spear, and as he writhes in dying pangs, he appears to vomit out the rain he had swallowed and it floods the country.

At the sociodiagnostic level, we find that *Homo sapiens* appear helpless in the face of the ravages of nature and the innocent only daughter of the king is the one to be sacrificed for the sake of the entire society. This requires the king to make the sacrifice; it also requires Sella to be a willing participant in their sacrifice for the sake of the community. Her opinion is not sought, but as is common in many African communities, the girl is not asked her opinion. Instead, she willingly submits to her father's decision to sacrifice her as a bride to be devoured by the ogre in more than one way.

We see the women decorating Sella and leaving her to her fate as an unwilling bride to the ogre. "Women even brought beads and ornaments and decked Sella as they sang wedding songs which symbolically portrayed her as an unwilling bride of the dragon." (Makila, 1986, p. 15). We are informed that the king instructs his wives to prepare to receive the unwelcome visitor, but the narrative is silent on Sella's own mother. She is rendered voiceless and opinion-less, unlike the direct and polemic Mwambu who goes against the whole village and takes on the ogre. Even the feelings of Sella's mother are not portrayed to us though the king's emotional agony is presented dramatically.

Finally, CDA also urges that we do a future-related *prospective critique* which should seek to contribute to the improvement of communication. Here, we ask for a better interpretation of situations. It is not necessary to sacrifice women as solutions to problems possibly created by men. Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 88) aver that "one of the aims of the DHA is to 'demystify' the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance". The unequal power relationship where

women are sacrificed to help solve men's issues is challenged in this narrative too. Alternative solutions must be found that involve all genders equally. This particular narrative does not show the particular anthropogenic activities that have led to the drought, but with intertextuality, we can infer from other oral narratives as, for example, cutting of trees and overgrazing. These anthropogenic activities often contribute to weather disasters and the calamity of climate change which is considered a catastrophe, not a problem (Stibbe, 2015). Stibbe argues that a catastrophe has no solution, unlike a problem which can be solved. Thus, a completely new way of approaching climate disasters must be sought and we start by looking at how an improvement in communication strategies can help address this.

Next, we discuss the linguistic strategies in the oral narrative that are used to bring out the ecolinguistics themes in the story. Table 1 presents a summary of the linguistic strategies in the oral narrative that I will discuss below, as presented in the discourse-historical analysis approach of CDA.

Table 1: Linguistic strategies of PDA in *Mwambu and Sella,* adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2009)

S/N	Strategy	Realisation	Examples from the oral narrative
1.	Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/ events and processes/ actions	Anthroponyms (peoples' names); toponyms (place names); tropes (figures of speech), e.g. "Famine swept through the country like a plague."
2.	Predication	Discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/ processes and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	Dramatic descriptions of the ogre with metaphors and similes, e.g. "He was 'the devil incarnate'." Allusions and euphemisms over the alleged consuming of Sella by *Mbilimbili Nyanja* are left unresolved.
3.	Argumentation	Justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	Consists of both topoi and fallacies, e.g. "The dragon must be appeased before rain can return to the country."; direct speech, e.g. "I can only release rain … if I am given the reputedly beautiful daughter of your king to consume." In the oral narration animating prosody is used to imitate the dragon's dreadful voice and Sella's shaky, apprehensive voice. Nature can frighten humans.
4.	Perspectivisation	Framing or discourse representation:	Discursive construction of the ogre as "other"; "heartless dragon"

		positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance	
5.	Intensification, mitigation	Modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances	Use of rhetorical questions such as: "How would they report the sad news to the king?" "His only daughter, in the prime of her life … to be sacrificed?"

4.2. Nomination

The first linguistic strategy I discuss is nomination. Nomination is the discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions. It simply entails naming people or things in a way which gives them prominence in the story. From the very introduction to the story, we find the following nominations:

> Long, long ago, rain disappeared from Bukusu country and people wondered what to do in order to survive through the long drought that ensued. Wells and rivers dried up; vegetation of every description withered away, and animals died from scarcity of the essentials of life. The land was parched dry and people could neither cultivate their fields nor brew beer. Famine swept through the country like a plague. (Makila, 1986, p. 15)

The social actors are diverse in this story. We have, for instance, the Bukusu people, the animals, the king, the land. Anthroponyms (peoples' names) are utilised in the case of the King's beautiful daughter Sella, Mwambu, her suitor, and *Mbilimbili Nyanja,* the heartless dragon, who are specifically named, being the key actors in the narrative. The toponym (place name) "Bukusuland" is also named here. Tropes (figures of speech) are evidenced in "Famine swept through the country like a plague" emphasising the devastation of the dearth. Similarly, whenever the dragon "moved about in the ocean, the earth trembled".

> Rain-makers in the country were time and again consulted, but none of them could bring a drop of rain. People prayed to and propitiated the Great God Khakaba to no avail. Finally, it was decided that the greatest *omufumu* [diviner] of the time be consulted so that he could see into the calamity that was threatening to devastate all life in the country. (ibid.)

The calamity of drought is personified as threatening, thus equalising nature with human properties, which is ecocentric. The second paragraph introduces those consulted for

possible solutions. These included the Rainmakers, the Great God Khakaba, and the *omufumu* (diviner), who is presented to us by translanguaging, in his local Bukusu dialect as the exact equivalent in English is not found. In this paragraph, we also have tropes of personification as the ogre is alleged to have drunk up all the rain and thus being the cause of the drought and must be appeased.

4.3. Predication

Predication strategies define the good, the bad and the ugly. Sella, the ultimate price to be paid for the rain to fall, is described with the most beautiful collocation and imagery: "She had eye-catching shapely legs, moon-white teeth, bewitchingly-gentle, sparkling eyes, ghee-soft lips, egg-shaped breasts, and when she walked her motion was graceful like that of a goddess." (Makila, 1986, p. 15). These descriptions of beauty show how much non-human things are admired and are useful to humans. Her description is contrasted with the foreboding ogre who "had its abode in the central depths of the ocean, where water swirled in perpetual whirlpools. Whenever he moved about in the ocean, the earth trembled, and there was thunder and bright lightning in the sky." He was so terrible that no one could come close to his dwellings and the delegation had to shout out their representations. In fact, the ogre is summed up as "death incarnate". Interestingly, an element of ecocentrism is shown here too, as humans should not occupy all spaces in the environment. Some should be left to non-humans.

The highly charged drama that was the appearance of the dragon on the land to claim his bride is described with a lot of hyperbole and simile: "There was a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a deafening clap of thunder, which was re-echoed by all the hills in the country. Dark, low-lying clouds floated in the sky and hung over mountain peaks like a swarm of locusts." (ibid., p. 16). This sheer terror shows how nature can display anger against human beings when provoked.

4.4. Argumentation

Argumentation in this story consists of both topoi and fallacies. The dragon is said to be the one who has caused the drought by swallowing up all the rain from the sky. Thus, in order for him to release the rain, it is alleged that a sacrifice must be made to try and appease him from interfering with the rain. The Bukusu believe this to be the cause of the lack of rain. However, with intertextuality, we see scientifically it is most unlikely that it is the dragon who has drunk up all the rain in the land. The argument is nothing but fallacious. The claim by the dragon, captured in the direct speech of his own words, that "'I can only release rain', roared back the dragon, 'if I am given the reputedly beautiful daughter of your king to consume'" (ibid., p. 15) is equally fallacious. Even in the story itself, the rain came in spite of the dragon not consuming Sella. But Stibbe's (2021a) story of conviction fits here. The Bukusu people appear to have a belief of what they needed to do, even when

costly, for the rain to fall, and it appears they recognise other players in the ecosphere: human beings sometimes need to make sacrifices to the more-than-human for a peaceful co-existence in the ecosphere.

4.5. Perspectivation

Perspectivation is the other linguistic strategy in CDA by Reisigl and Wodak (2009). Perspectivation allows us to understand how human beings can be troubled when the climate is forbearing. They can agree to fulfil even ominous demands just to be able to live in peace and harmony on the earth with other beings. In *Mwambu and Sella*, perspectivation is demonstrated in the dilemma of the King's delegation, which had ominous news to report back to the king: "The men returned home with heavy hearts. How would they report the sad news to the king? The king's only daughter! Surely that was a treasure the king would not part with." (Makila, 1986, p. 16). Rhetorical questions show the mental anguish of the delegation.

The community believes in fate as they seem to accept the forbidding sacrifice demanded by the ogre. They evaluate the situation and decide to fulfil the dragon's ominous demands as a matter of fact, feeling unable to extricate themselves from the unreasonable demand of the other-than-human being with whom they co-exist in the world. On the contrary, Mwambu dares to take the dragon on and engages him in a David-Goliath battle. At first, he appears to be losing as all his weapons are gobbled down by the ogre, but finally, he leashes out his secret weapon, the magic spear, and demolishes the ogre.

4.6. Intensification

Parallelism adds to the emphatic description as it adds rhythm, building up the picture of the devastating drought: "Wells and rivers dried up; vegetation of every description withered away, and animals died from a scarcity of the essentials of life." (p. 15).

The next level of DHA to be examined is the sociopolitical one. The relationship between human beings and nature is reversed in this oral narrative; the dominance of human beings over nature is challenged by the usually defenceless nature. Here, human beings have to face the wrath of nature and get themselves out of the situation. For ecolinguistics, we seek ways of changing the stories we live by to try and create a more balanced relationship between the human male and female/nature. Critically we see that the blame for the drought has to be looked for elsewhere, in the non-human. This is common to humans not being willing to take responsibility for their own actions, which could be the cause of the drought. The dry season is attributed to the dragon in the lake who has swallowed up the whole river, which ascribes wilful action to the dragon. In fact, in Bukusu there is nothing like the English vague subject in "it is raining"; instead, the Bukusu say "the rain is raining", since nature has the power and ability to do things just

like human beings.

Nature has agency here. According to a Deep Ecology ecosophy this could therefore be considered a positive discourse since it ascribes intrinsic value to species beyond the human. Nature is not the passive laid back thing to be exploited by humans for their pleasure, but we see nature causing humans some severe pain. Crops appear to have decided to dry up, and the vulnerability of man becomes obvious in the face of something higher than himself. His domination here is lacking, and he is at the mercy of the angry, cruel nature. However, the human female is denied agency altogether: it takes a man, Mwambu, to save Sella and fight the dragon to release rain. We do not hear of Sella's attempts to escape or even of trying to resist the whole terrifying drama.

Future-related *prospective critique* is that women have to be given a voice and agency in future. The silencing of women in the Bukusu narrative does not show their contribution to society or even their alleviation of climate change. Cross (2018, p. 28) argues that the patriarchal values of rationality and power have othered the natural environment and women. In order to prevent irreparable ecological destruction, we need to change the relationship between humanity and nature to one that is ecologically responsive. Plumwood (1991, p. 10) decries the dualism which is the dichotomy between humans on the one hand and nature on the other. It is an anthropocentric culture which reaffirms the human's position as outside of and distant from nature (Plumwood, 1991, p. 10). Furthermore, as women have normally been dominated and sacrificed to appease and satisfy men, Sella accepts that she will go to the monster to be his bride. The perspective of her mother and the other women is not given and is, in fact, erased (Stibbe, 2017). She is dressed up beautifully and sent off to meet her husband unwillingly. But of course, as is usually presented in male-dominated societies like the Bukusu, man has to rescue the ostensibly feeble woman, and so of necessity, Mwambu resorts to following his love to meet the monster. Nevertheless, the battle between the human and more-than-human is not an easy one. Mwambu's weapons are gobbled up by the dragon, one by one. When all seems desperate, he pulls out his secret weapon, the magic spear and hurls it at the dragon to finally overpower him. Here we find that the answer to the problem cannot be explained rationally, and the solution ends up being through Mwambu's secret weapon of the magic spear. Humans do not have all the answers to natural disasters, and they have to resort to the beyond-human to wriggle themselves from the disaster.

5. Discussion

Having analysed the data using PDA, I now do an ecolinguistic analysis to examine the stories and ecosophies. I start with a summary of the stories the Bukusu live by, as realised in the narrative and shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Ecolinguistic forms of stories as per Stibbe (2021a)

S/N	Story	Explanation	Realisation
1.	Evaluations	Cognitive evaluations are associations that we have in memory about what is good or evil; cultural, conventional	The story is evaluated as good since ultimately, man emerges as the winner — anthropocentric ecosophy. Rain is good and must fall at whatever cost.
2.	Convictions	Stories in our minds about whether a particular description of reality is true, likely, unlikely or false according to our beliefs	There must be a cause of the drought that has to do with human beings. The solution must be found in human beings. Fallacious conviction: Women are helpless and must be rescued by brave men.
3.	Erasure	Patterns of language which erase or background something in texts	All women except Sella are erased. We do not hear of her mother's opinions or feelings about the ominous sacrifice to help alleviate the drought. Women just prepare food for the unwelcome visitor and decorate the unwilling bride for the ogre.
4.	Salience	This involves giving prominence to certain elements	The more-than-human is given salience in this story. We also have the male gender foregrounded as the one able to offer solutions.

This story clearly demonstrates to us that though humans think they have control over nature, times can change, and they have to rethink their position in relation to this. Cross (2018, p. 19) asseverates that in order to protect the earth from irreparable ecological destruction, humans need to change the relationship they have with the natural world from one which is hierarchical and fragmented to one which is ecologically responsive. We must change the current relationship we have with nature, which is hierarchical and fragmented because it is rooted in a culture of separation created by a masculinist modernity. Modernity is a culture where science and technology are posited as the epitome of reason, in contrast with pre-modernity, demonstrated in this Bukusu oral narrative, which was centred around nature, myth and religion. This culture of separation divides the world into a set of opposites. These sets of opposites are known as dualisms (Plumwood, 1991, p. 10). Cross (2018) urges that *Homo sapiens* adopt an ethic of care approach to nature, which can transcend the current oppressive system because it aims to recreate our relationship with nature. Dualism is to be avoided, and all beings living on the earth should be treated equally and with care.

Though I initially set out to analyse the story of *Mwambu and Sella* using a positive discourse analysis approach, the analysis has brought out ideologies that are not altogether positive. The story is, in fact, an ambivalent discourse according to my ecosophy based on ecofeminism. There is a positive element in the presentation of nature whereby nature is salient and given prominence and ascribed personhood as being able to control itself, including human beings. However, there is also negativity in the unequal power relations that miniaturises women and salients men. All women, men and nature should be equal in this environmental conservation effort. This story adds to the reality that concerning the environment, most of the discourses can hardly be described as "positive" and may need a critical discourse analysis instead of a positive discourse analysis. What we learn from the CDA gives us food for thought about how humans need to be more consciously positive in dealing with nature.

We can learn from the Bukusu the elements of giving agency to nature and describing the more-than-human with personhood qualities. In many Bantu languages, of which Lubukusu (Bukusu language) is a part, animals are presented with human characteristics. In Kiswahili all animals are presented with the 'a' prefix, which makes them like human beings, not as belonging to inanimate things' classes. For instance, the Swahili say "*Ng'ombe amelala nje*" ("the cow is sleeping outside", using the class prefix 'a', which is used for human beings, not "inalala" ("it is sleeping", with the class prefix 'I' for inanimate classes) as is commonly used in English. This regarding of animals as having abilities such as those helps towards constructing them positively, hence valuing and conserving them better.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of *Mwambu and Sella* has enabled us to get a glimpse of the discursive construction of nature in the Bukusu worldview. In general, nature is positively constructed and given agency in the oral narrative. This tends towards an ecocentric ecosophy which is necessary for better valuing and conservation of the environment. However, in the process of analysing the stories lived by the Bukusu using evaluation, conviction, salience and erasure stories, it became evident that nature and female characters are also negatively portrayed to some extent. The female voice is more or less erased from the narrative altogether. Even though Sella is nominalised and anthroponymed and this seems to give her salience, yet we see her being a silent victim of the battle between man and nature. She never questions the unfair demands of *Mbilimbili Nyanja* and instead is willing to suffer vicariously for the sake of the community so that the rain may fall. Florence (2016) has already pointed out that in Bukusu society, the female characters are subdued, and role expectations reflect unequal power relations; girls lack role models to emulate. Even folktales, which girls enjoy, deny females a tradition of agency and solidarity. This needs to change and we can start this change by critiquing our stories. To redirect the course of humanity, we must change the stories we live by (Korten, 2006) if they do not contribute positively to our co-existence with other creatures in the ecosphere.

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