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An ecolinguistic reading of Luhya oral narratives in Kenya: The ecofeminism and ecocentrism ecosophies

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the narration of the Earth's ecosphere in tales from the Luhya community which resides within the vicinity of the rich, natural Kakamega rainforest in Kenya. Ecolinguistics is used to explore the harmonious co-existence of human beings with more-than-humans, such as the forest and its occupants, and how this relationism [connectedness, because existence necessarily means being in a relationship] contributes to environmental conservation. Five selected oral narratives of the Luhya are investigated with a view to exploring the ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism and how the forest is to be revered and left to exist peacefully. The findings show that positive, negative, and ambivalent stories exist, and ecofeminism and ecocentrism ecosophies are salient. Like ecocriticism, ecolinguistics is also concerned not only with examining texts for environmental themes but also analysing the societal practices relating to nature and conservation. This paper gives a more in-depth analysis of the approach of ecosophies in oral narratives, which has not received adequate scholarly attention.

Keywords: ecolinguistics; ecosophies; ecofeminism; convironment; oral narratives; Kenya

1. Background

The forest is a very important source of rain which contributes to rivers and other life-sustaining resources. Unfortunately, increased decimation of forests has continued to contribute to climate change which leads to environmental disasters. Extremes of weather such as floods and droughts recur year in, year out, leading to famines and displacement of populations, as well as to conflict among neighbours wrangling for the scarce green

pastures. But has this situation always been like this? In this paper, I examine traditional attitudes of the Luhya towards nature such as forests and their occupants. Analysing underlying ideologies gives an insight into Luhya standpoints on living with the more-than-humans on this Earth and vouches for ecological conservation. I investigate five select narratives from the Luhya community living next to the rich, natural Kakamega rainforest. Ecolinguistics is used to explore the view of the forest and its occupants and how fears inculcated in oral narratives contribute to values of ecofeminism [women's struggle in environmental preservation] and ecocentrism [seeing inherent value in all of nature].

Human beings do not exist apart from their environment but are an integral part of the "convironment" [the togetherness of humans and nature] (Fill, 2021). Fill (2021) utilises the term "convironment" in his linkage of language to peace. He points out that "the Aborigines in Australia say that they do not own the territory, but the territory owns them! They do not believe in possessing ground, and therefore there are no wars between the different groups" (Fill, 2021, p. 4).

The Luhya are an ethnic community that lives in Western Kenya, East Africa, and some are found in Eastern Uganda. The Luhya language is spoken by the Baluhya (Luhya people) and consists of eighteen dialects: Banyala, Masaaba, Marama, Tachoni, Bukusu, Maragoli, Samia, Batsotso, Idakho, Isukha, Gisu, Kisa, Marachi, Tiriki, Kabras, Khayo, Banyore, and Wanga (Bulimo, 2013). The groups that speak these dialects are of necessity related and share common values and traditions. They share common beliefs and fears, which are constructed and propagated in the oral narratives. Most oral narratives were told to girls in their grandmothers' huts usually around the hearth fire as they prepared supper. Even after supper, the girls would take turns to tell stories until they dozed off one by one. The young boys would be told stories of courage and strength by their fathers and uncles. All Luhya children knew the traditional narratives as they were used as a form of literacy where values were inculcated in the moral lessons of the stories. Gestures were used in these tales and audience participation expected, such as joining in the choruses and refrains of songs.

In Luhya narratives, the forest is best left to the ogre. It was quite unwise to encroach on his sacrosanct space especially if you were a girl. Venturing into the depths of the forest would without doubt risk some dire consequences. This spread of fear helped to ward off any would-be destroyer from the forest. The wrath of encroaching on ogre's sacred forest still has relevance even today. The present study is predicated on the premise that the stories that the children are told impact their character and make known the societal expectations to them (Muleka, 2016). Thus the analysis of the representation of nature, including the forest and its occupants, in oral narratives, especially for girls, is crucial for our understanding of environmental attitudes of the entire community.

2. Related literature and theoretical framework

Ecolinguistics is a relatively new but rapidly growing sub-discipline of linguistics. It gained provenance with the "ecolinguistic turn" (Stibbe, 2012) whereby it has become important

that the discipline of linguistics also embraces a sub-discipline that is concerned with the environment since we are occupants of the world. This turn requires linguistics to do more than just analysing formal and functional meta-linguistics, such as Chomsky's syntactic theories (Chomsky, 1965), irrespective of the realities of living in an endangered ecosystem. Though Zhou (2021) talks of six ecolinguistic turns, two main strands of ecolinguistics have developed side by side: one based on the "language ecology" metaphor pioneered by Haugen (1972), and the other stirred by Halliday (1990) and Stibbe (2012, 2015, 2018, 2021a, 2021b) which concerns itself with analysis of the relationship between human beings and the environment with other more-than-human occupants in the ecosystems. Following Haugen, Abram (1996) argues that oral cultures had languages which helped people to get attuned to their environment and decried the alienation of people from the local earth. The spread of dominant languages such as English destroy these environmental knowledges that were embedded in these cultures and that helped them live sustainably in their environment.

Halliday (1990) and Mühlhäusler (2001, 2003), among others, have also contributed to the growth of ecolinguistics following the other strand that focuses on text analyses for ecolinguistic themes. A comprehensive review of the ecolinguistic work in the post-COVID 2021 period has been carried out by Zhang (2022) where she gives the historical overview of the sub-discipline. Stibbe (2014, 2015, 2021a, 2021b) has published much on this strand of ecolinguistics and charted the way forward in its development. Stibbe (2015, p. 183) states that "ecolinguistics analyses language to reveal the stories we live by, judges those stories according to an ecosophy, resists stories which oppose the ecosophy, and contributes to the search for new stories to live by". Thus, stories are not conceived as those tales "read to children at bedtime, shared around a fire, or conveyed through anecdotes in formal speeches", but "cognitive structures in the minds of individuals which influence how they think, talk and act" (Stibbe, 2020, p. 2, as cited in Franklin et al., 2022, p. 287).

This view and definition of ecolinguistics is the same as the one given on the official website of the International Ecolinguistics Association (IEA), and it goes beyond a mere focus on the grammar, towards a focus on how language is used to tell stories about the world (Ghorbanpour, 2021, p. 6). Ecolinguistics questions the diverse stories, which are discourses on the environment, and classifies them as positive, negative or ambivalent. The positive discourses are beneficial and are encouraged to continue; the negative ones are destructive and unsustainable and must be rejected; the ambivalent must be dissected for the good in them to be promoted while the bad aspects are to be rejected. It also proposes or seeks more beneficial stories to live by, as our actions today impact all in the ecosystem including future generations. This classification of beneficial, destructive or ambivalent stories depends on the analyst's own ecosophy.

Following the proposal of Okri (1996) that if we want to change our perceptions and attitudes we need to change the stories we live by, Stibbe (2015) proposes eight types of story: frames, ideologies, metaphors, identity, evaluations, convictions, erasure and

salience. In the revised edition of his work, Stibbe (2021a) adds a ninth story type: narratives. Of these nine, I focus on ideology, since it somehow encompasses the rest, but I also touch on salience and erasure where they are significant. Stibbe (2015) defines ideologies as stories that underlie discourses, i.e., characteristic language features used by members of a group: "belief systems about how the world was, is, will be or should be which are shared by members of particular groups in society" (p. 23). In this paper, I look for impressions in the oral narratives that display these discursive constructions of both humans and more-than-humans in the narratives to reveal underlying ideologies. Salience involves the valorisation of an area of life or giving prominence to — i.e., foregrounding — some idea for a purpose. Stibbe (2021a) explains that ecolinguistics itself gives salience to the environment compared to the mainstream linguistics whose focus is usually just on language in human interaction without considering the ecosphere in which language practices occur. While other branches of linguistics address linguistic concerns such as language use in society, discourse analysis and theories of language, ecolinguistics emphasises the role of the environment in sustaining life while also doing linguistic analyses of texts.

Stibbe (2021a) refines the definition of ecolinguistics to be "the study of the role of language in the *life-sustaining interactions of humans with other species and the physical environment*" (Stibbe 2021a, p. 203, my emphasis). He underscores the practical need for ecolinguistics and emphasises its practical value in building a more ecological civilisation. Hence, ecolinguistics is not just about analysing and classifying stories but must also be contributing to life-sustaining relationships among occupants of the world we live in. It focuses on the ecosystems life depends on, and on the communication that informs it (Bortoluzzi, 2021, p. 109).

2.1. Ecosophies

As we endeavour to identify the various stories we live by, we also analyse how the ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism are involved in each story. The term "ecosophy" is a blend or portmanteau of "ecology" and "philosophy". This term was actually coined by the father of Deep Ecology, Arne Naess, closely followed by Guattari (2000). Levesque (2016, p. 511) explains that the word "ecosophy" combines the Greek *oikos* and *sophia*: "household" and "wisdom". As with "ecology", the meaning of "eco-" (*oikos*) refers to something larger than a mere household understood in a domestic sense. From the ecosophical perspective, our *oikos* is the Earth taken as a whole, as we inhabit it. Thus, an ecosophy is "*a philosophical worldview or a system inspired by our living conditions in the ecosphere*" ["biosphere" or that part of the Earth's environment in which living organisms are found and includes land, air and water that support living things].

Naess' and Guattari's approaches are slightly different in emphasis and even appear contradictory, but both are concerned with locating human beings in their environment and achieving a harmony between humans and nature. Naess places the human being as

separate from his environment, but with an inherently unavoidable and irreducible co-dependence of man and nature (Levesque, 2016, p. 511). His concepts of deep ecology and environmental wisdom are often found in traditional religions and cultural practices, thus our interest in Luhya social practices. Unlike Naess's dualism, on the other hand, Guattari emphasises "plurality of ecologies, environments, habitats, that do not 'surround' us as a container would envelop its contents, but that define us and that we constantly define and reconfigure in a network of relations" (as cited in Antonioli, 2018, p. 75). This means that Naess demonstrates dualism [the theory that something (an object, an idea or the whole world) is split into two parts which are separate from each other]. In contrast to dualism, Guattari emphasises many ways of looking at nature, and that indeed human life is very much a part of nature and not distinct from it or in opposition to it.

Stibbe (2014, 2015, 2018) holds that there is a spectrum of ecosophy which varies from anthropocentric to ecocentric, localist to anarchist, neoliberal to socialist, and optimistic to pessimistic, and these ecosophies can overlap with each other. Ecolinguists can choose, extend, or combine any kind of existing ecosophy, or develop a new one by themselves (Stibbe, 2015). Ecosophy is, therefore, a set of values that the analyst uses as criteria for evaluation. Stibbe's own ecosophy can be summarised in "the notion of *Living!,* which, in short, means valuing the flourishing and wellbeing of all living beings and the natural environment" (Ghorbanpour, 2021, p. 2). In this paper, my preferred ecosophies are ecofeminism and ecocentrism. Ecofeminism (see, e.g., Pandey, 2011) resists all sorts of oppression especially that against women and marginalised groups, and seeks more value for women in their environmentally friendly lifestyles. It resists the "othering" of those thought of as "women" and "animals" and the ways this othering contributes to the destruction of the environment. Ecofeminism argues for the importance of care as well as justice and emotion intertwined with reason, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications on all human beings, other animals, and the planet (Adams & Gruen, 2014).

Being an interdisciplinary academic as well as activist movement, ecofeminism has necessarily developed into an umbrella term for diverse strands emphasising distinct concerns of the discipline; but although the categorisation of ecofeminism is a contested point, their point of confluence is what Karen Warren describes as the "important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature" (as cited in Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002, p. 1). Of concern here is particularly the postcolonial strand of ecofeminism since women like nature have been adversely affected by androcentric imperialism, specifically "capitalistic global economy and its imperialistic practices" (Murmu & Pandey, 2022, p. 10). As colonised peoples were marginalised and exploited for material resources for developing the global north, now Third World women "are bringing the concern with living and survival back to centre stage in human history in recovering the chances for the survival of all life; they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society, and through it the recovery of the earth as sustainer and provider" (Shiva, 1994, as cited in Pandey, 2019, p. 280). Ecofeminism can

then be "an effective political and theoretical position through which to critique and challenge imperialistic androcentric ideological positions" (Murmu & Pandey, 2022, p. 11).

2.2. Ecolinguistics in related studies

Ecology has concerned literary studies in the ecocritical move and as Johns-Putra (2016, p. 7) points out "it is clear that climate change is no longer a marginal topic in literature and literary studies". However, the area of oral literature is still fairly new in ecolinguistic analyses, though growing rapidly. Ibrahim (2021, p. 104) has done an analysis of fables for ecolinguistic themes. He sought, among others, to "provide an ecolinguistic analysis by tracing how the animals treat each other, how the animals treat the surrounding elements of nature, how both (animals and humans) use nature, how human to other species is represented, and to draw an analogy between animal relations and human social relations". Ibrahim's work is related to ours insofar as he uses ecolinguistics to analyse oral literature, but whereas he focuses on fables, this study stretches to other genres of oral narratives. Also the community he studies is Arabic while ours is the Luhya of Western Kenya, which is African.

Fill (2021, p. 1) suggests the need for ecolinguistic analyses of the languages of other continents. Some Nigerian languages, he points out, do not preach growthism and thinking in contrasts, but show degrees and do not polarise; they are therefore more peaceful. Such an approach has been taken by Ubanako and Acha (2022) who also analyse ecocentrism in Cameroonian newspaper discourses and argue that "ecocentric newspaper discourses are considered environmental advocacies that align with government efforts to preserve Cameroon's ecosystems" (p. 28). Of more relevance to oral narratives is the study by Ambe (2022) who specifically uses ecolinguistics to analyse select indigenous oral narratives from Cameroon. His focus, though, was on the diverse ecosophies manifested in oral narratives. While anthropocentrism focuses on the welfare of human beings at the expense of nature, ecocentrism ensures a more balanced view with nature being given due focus. Ambe points out that although these oral narratives and the languages through which they are expressed are apparently ignored, they do remain very important, especially in contemporary society. An analysis of these narratives reveals various ecological philosophies which are important in the fight against environmental crises. It is highlighted that "through the use of oral narratives, indigenous people, consciously or unconsciously, engage in fighting against ecological catastrophes like climate change, depletion of species, pollution, destruction of farmlands through the use of chemicals, and extinction of protected species" (Ambe, 2022, p. 1). The point of departure from Ambe's work is our focus on ecofeminism as the ecosophy of concern which gives emphasis to the role of women in fighting environmental destruction, and ecocentrism which emphasises more-than-human values.

In analysing the Arabic children story entitled *Disappearance of the Nile* written and illustrated by Rania Hussein Amin, Ramadan (2020) explicates how storytelling to children can be used to enhance environmental consciousness. She uses ecolinguistics to discuss

the great effect language may have on ecosystems. For instance, she points out how the story gives the Nile River salience by giving it a voice to complain about how "he" has been mistreated and so "he" had to disappear. This helps to inform our study because though our stories are oral narratives unlike hers, they both utilise storytelling to children as a tool for creating environmental awareness and conservation.

3. Objectives

The aim of this paper is to provide a more nuanced understanding of how different ideologies shape the ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism in the Luhya people as evidenced by their oral narratives. The specific objectives are:

1) to illustrate the eco-ideologies Luhya live by as demonstrated in their oral narratives;
2) to explicate how the ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism are valorised in Luhya oral narratives with the aim of contributing towards better relations in the ecosphere.

4. Method

In this paper, I have purposively selected five oral narratives, but the themes necessarily are brought out in many other oral narratives. The stories I have selected are stories that belong to the Luhya community as a whole. Being folktales, the general plot is given, but each performance depends on the individual narrator who frames it according to the audience he or she is performing for. The stories from the Kabras community were obtained through the author's own recollection from childhood storytelling sessions. The stories I narrate here were shared among us as young girls during evenings after supper as we awaited sleep. Several of us would congregate at our grandmother's hut and sleep on mattresses spread out on the floor. We would then tell stories in turn starting with whoever slept at the end of the row of mattresses. We would enjoy the tales but doze off one by one until eventually the narrator would often find themselves talking to themselves. The stories would continue the next night with slight variations depending on the narrator.

I supplemented these recollections with document analysis for narratives from other Luhya sub-ethnic communities such as Bukusu and Banyore (see also Ambe, 2022, p. 4). These are captured in Table 1. I selected these stories purposively though the nature theme was not the focus of the original narrators. Nevertheless, we infer ideologies and some social practices that are relevant to nature from these tales. I did an ecolinguistic analysis which entailed looking for environmental themes in the narratives. My focus was on ideologies about the environment (humans and their surroundings). I classified the categories of discourses as either positive (beneficial), negative, or ambivalent with both positive and negative elements. I also sought out how the ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism were manifested in these oral narratives.

Table 1: Method of collection and summary of Luhya oral narratives

Narrative (NARR)	Title and community	Method of collection	Brief summary
NARR 1	The broken pot (Kabras)	Recollection from childhood	A girl goes to the Chief Ogre to be eaten because of breaking her pot accidentally. Rescued by her father.
NARR 2	Wanakhatandi and the ogres (Kabras)	Recollection from childhood	A famine leads to infestation of ogres who demand to eat a man called Wanakhatandi. He sacrifices his wife and girl children who hide in a tree and cook carrion of starved domestic animals.
NARR 3	The orphan and the cow (Kabras)	Recollection from childhood	A jealous stepmother tries to poison an orphan boy but a cow would always warn him. When found out she is sent back to her parents.
NARR 4	Nasio and Aela (Banyore)	Document analysis (Ondieki, 2018)	A threatened woman leaves her baby girl in the forest and she is found and nurtured by an ogre. Eventually rescued by her mother.
NARR 5	The blacksmith and the pumpkins (Bukusu)	Document analysis (Makila, 1986) and recollection from childhood	A blacksmith went to extract iron ore in the deep forest in the far west. Due to a famine his family ate a poisonous pumpkin and died. A dove flew to the forest and informed him. He came and resurrected them with a healing herb.

5. Findings and discussion

In the traditional Luhya setting, there was a border that was an entrance to the forest where people could collect firewood, graze cattle and pick some fruits. However, to venture deep into the forest was highly discouraged. People went to the forest only during daytime and in groups, properly armed especially if they were going hunting; and it was unthinkable that one could go inside alone. Not only was there real danger of encountering wild animals, but to ward off the unknown danger lurking in the deep unknowns the imagination of oral literature discouraged penetration into the forest through the scary ogres who were said to inhabit its depths. Even though Stibbe (2021a) characterises nine "stories that we live by", in my analysis I believe that ideology was the main story and the others were manifestations of ideology. Gong (2019, p. 10) also considers ideology as an umbrella term that can cover the other stories. Thus, in this analysis, the story we live by is actually ideology. Even where we mention the rest they are ultimately covered by ideology.

5.1. Ideologies

In critical discourse analysis, ideology refers to the deep biases human beings live with and

their attitudes towards other human and non-human entities in the ecosphere. Ideology is manifested as connecting discourse with the practical, lived experiences of a social group. Wodak (2013) citing Thompson (1990) defines ideology as referring to:

> … social forms and processes within which, and by means of which, hegemonic symbolic forms circulate in the social world. Ideology, for the DHA [Discourse Historical Approach], is seen as an (often) one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group. Ideologies serve as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse: for example, by establishing hegemonic identity narratives, or by controlling the access to specific discourses or public spheres ('gate-keeping'). In addition, ideologies also function as a means of transforming power relations more or less radically. (Wodak, 2013, p. 88)

The approach on ideology taken by Stibbe is to demonstrate that ideologies are just stories and so should not be taken as truth. Stibbe defines ideologies as stories that underlie discourses: "belief systems about how the world was, is, will be or should be, which are shared by members of particular groups in society" (Stibbe, 2015, p. 23). Stibbe maintains that "because ideologies are presented as obvious facts about the world, we may often not realise that they are just stories. Therefore, one of the purposes of analysing discourses is to expose their underlying ideologies; in other words, what is of significance in discourse analysis is not just individual texts … but patterns of linguistic features that appear in several texts and convey a fixed ideology" (as cited in Ghorbanpour, 2021, p. 2).

The most glaring ideology in all these narratives is about the ostensible helplessness of the girl and women, thus the emphasis on ecofeminism. In Narrative 1 we see the poor girl so scared when she breaks her pot that she does not wait to face her father's wrath. She takes herself to the ogre to be eaten, as she had been threatened by her father, and sings:

> Dad made eight pots
> And we are eight girls,
> And he said 'Whoever breaks their pot,
> I will take them to Namunyu in the forest to eat them
> If you are Namunyu eat me then, we see!

There is a contradiction here because the selfsame father goes to attack the ogre for doing what he had been expected to do. It is somehow surprising that ogres are given some salience here since the first few ogres that she meets are honest: they admit to not being the Chief Ogre that was promised a meal of whoever broke their pot. In most Luhya tales, ogres are presented as vile and greedy, but here their honesty stands out. Indeed the girl is to be only eaten by the real Chief Ogre. This presentation of the ogres as being better

organised shows some ecocentrism and goes counter to the ideology that the other more-than-human is no good and is always seeking to destroy the human, thus must be feared and attacked.

Table 2 demonstrates ideologies in the selected oral narratives. In this table, the types of stories in the third column demonstrate how and why "stories we live by" are powerful; "we do not perceive them as 'possible versions' of reality representation, but as normalised and uncontroversial 'reality', the way we are and things are. Ideology in stories we live by is hard to detect because it tends to be 'naturalised', become social habit and perceived as inevitable and objective, rather than an ideologically-based social-construct" (Bortoluzzi, 2021, p. 111). These oral narratives also realise discourses in either of the three categories of destructive, ambivalent and beneficial discourses. The categorisation is based upon their underlying ideologies and their implications for the environment and the natural world. According to the author's ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism, these stories are destructive when they differ with these ecosophies, ambivalent when they align with the ecosophies in some aspects and differ in others; and beneficial when they align fully with ecofeminism and ecocentrism. The beneficial stories are alternative discourses that convey ideologies that can encourage people to protect the environment and the life-supporting ecosystems. Stibbe emphasises that the purpose of ecolinguistics is not just to analyse the wrong discourses, but to help in the search for positive alternative ones. Just like I consider Stibbe's other story types as encompassed by ideologies, I also consider the other positive ecosophies in these narratives as ultimately falling under the overarching ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism.

Table 2: Types of stories (realisation of ideologies) in Luhya narratives

S/N	Oral narrative	Manifestation of ideologies	Category of story
1.	NARR 3	Power dynamics in hegemonic masculinity in dad over daughters: Women must ostensibly be guided and controlled by men. Ecologism: the non-human world is worthy of moral consideration.	Ambivalent: ogres have both positive and negative traits.
2.	NARR 2	Unequal gender relations: power over women and girls: girls are food for ogres.	Positive story: Wife preserves life: refuses to kill anyone.
3.	NARR 3	Power dynamics of wicked stepmother trying to poison orphan boy.	Positive: The cow rescues the boy, thus sustains life.
4.	NARR 4	Power dynamics in hegemonic masculinity in father who despises baby girls. Ecologism: the non-human world is worthy of moral consideration; the	Ambivalent story: negative as baby abandoned in forest for being a girl which is against ecofeminism; but beneficial as ogre helps baby, which is life-

		ogre surprisingly nurtures helpless human child.	sustaining, which is ecocentric.
5.	NARR 5	Environmental conservatism: not all that grows is food for human consumption.	Positive: non-human bird is helpful in restoring life. Ecocentric: a change from the usual anthropocentrism.

Narrative 1 shows power dynamics in hegemonic masculinity in the father and Chief Ogre. The ideology is that women ostensibly must be guided and controlled by men. The father threatens his daughters so much that when the little one breaks her pot she does not wait to face her father's wrath but sends herself to the forest in search of the Chief Ogre to be eaten. The mother is erased[1] in the narrative, as are other entities in the forest, and salience is given to the two male threats. Chief Ogre falls asleep satisfied and "snores like thunder" but soon faces the wrath of the father who immediately kills him and recovers his daughter and the entire people Chief Ogre had eaten before. The Ogre should stay in the forest and not come out to eat people and people should stay in their clearings and not venture into the forest (Ogre's territory). Humans benefit from nature as they fetch water from the streams, and harmonious existence with nature is emphasised. This story is of the ambivalent category. It is positive in that the chimera ogres are surprisingly portrayed positively as honest as well as loyal and faithful to their chief: they would not eat his meat even when opportunity presented itself. It is, however, negative and anthropocentric in that the father kills the Chief Ogre in his own territory though he is in this case innocent so to say. Ecofeminism is against all forms of oppression, even of the more-than-humans.

Salience is given to the forest as it is foregrounded as a sacred place as well as being fearful. By creating the imagination of the fiery ogre the girl child was warned not to venture into the forest depths. In reality this was to create space for non-human animals that occupied the deeps and created a symbiotic co-existence. I have argued elsewhere that the Luhya community lived peacefully with non-humans; for example, going to draw water in the evenings was discouraged via fables, but in reality it allowed animals to come and drink water undisturbed. Also the hippos that feed in the evening and night would be allowed to partake of their food freely without human interference (Khasandi-Telewa, 2006, 2016), which also avoided unnecessary human-wildlife conflict.

Narrative 2 follows up with this ideology as we see power dynamics over women and girls by Wanakhatandi who despises his first wife for giving birth to many girls with no boys. He sacrifices them to the ogres to save himself and his beloved second wife, though she is barren. It appears that it were better not to have any children than to have many girls. The ogres are given valence as greedy but also gullible to be fed carrion instead of real human flesh. The tree as a hiding place and safe haven for the despised family shows

[1] Erasure is one of the story types discussed in Stibbe (2021a) but not focused on in this paper. It simply means that sometimes some idea or person can be deliberately ignored or concealed by a writer to hide certain facts.

the nurturing effect of nature, highlighting ecocentrism. As Guattari (2000) argues there is no duality, but humans are part of the existence — indeed, part of the "convironment" (Fill, 2021). Destruction of nature has ostensibly led to this drought and famine, thus ecological justice is leading to humans being eaten by ogres. Even today humans continue to suffer the wrath of nature which is depicted here in the mythical ogres. It is a fact that in the modern world, the humans who suffer most from anthropocentrism are those who do the least damage to nature. So here too Wanakhatandi's wife and children are threatened to be eaten for reasons they have no control over. There is erasure in that the cause of the drought is not explicitly given, unlike in other narratives not selected here where sometimes it is attributed to angering the gods and might call for sacrifice for the rains to fall and food to become available.

Narrative 3 is strange for ecofeminism since it is about a woman who exercises power dynamics over the poor orphan boy. However, this gives ecocentrism salience as it is the cow which saves the boy from danger. It is a reversal of the ideology that women are always the victims. Thus ecofeminism protects all the vulnerable, irrespective of gender.

Narrative 4 has a very positive discourse since the ogre is given salience as a life nurturer where human beings have failed. Due to the hegemonic masculinity, Aela's father threatens his wives with divorce should they give birth to baby girls. Aela's mother turns to the forest which is again a safe haven and gives birth to twins whereby she takes the boy home to be celebrated and leaves the girl to her fate. Fortunately, help comes from the most unexpected quarters — from the chimeric ogre. The ideology of ogres being greedy and destructive is defused here since he exhibits fatherly love and care for the baby girl, in fact. Though his hidden agenda is actually to increase her size to make a bigger meal, not merely enough for a starter, she proves so useful to him in executing domestic chores that he grows to love and value her as his own daughter. He becomes so dependent on her that her departure leads to his death from grief. Ecocentrism is given salience in the fatherly non-human (ogre) such that he is given a name, Nasio, which is usually given to human boys. Relationism is clearly evident in this positive narrative.

Narrative 5 also valorises the bird as the saviour of the situation as she is the one who takes the message to the blacksmith to come and resuscitate his children. The entities such as the forest are salient as they provide healing herbs, iron for the blacksmith, and fruits and food for the family that they survived on before drought completed its destruction of the environment.

Salience is also given to non-humans in the imagination of the ogre. The ogre represents the unknown and is discursively constructed as some unimaginable monster, sometimes with one eye. The ogre is given salience in Narratives 1, 2, and 4. In fact, in Narrative 4 there is anthroponymy: he is given a name, Nasio, which is reminiscent of the boy in the third narrative. Thus, the imaginary ogre is presented ambivalently since, indeed, in life the unknown can be both positive and negative. Interestingly, in Narrative 4 the ogre, Nasio, has some great character traits. He is able to nurture a baby girl and raise her up as his own daughter. He also dies of grief and starvation when Aela is rescued and her mother

persuades her that she is a human being and cannot be an ogre's daughter. Even worse, one day she risks being eaten. So she accepts to go home and live with other human beings. This moves away from the anthropocentric worldview to ecocentrism where the attention shifts from the powerful human being to a baby needing more-than-humanly help for survival. The ecosophy here is ecocentric which fits in with ecofeminism. The category of the story is ambivalent for two reasons: one, there is salience given to the ogre and the human being is weak. However, there is still hunting and killing of guinea fowls which the ogre eats instead of Aela who has become useful to him and he postpones eating her.

It is not lost to us that in the first place Aela ended up in the forest because her father did not want any more daughters and threatened to divorce whichever wife gave birth to a girl while throwing a feast for whosoever gave birth to a boy. Men are otherwise erased in this story after the initial introduction and even the rescue here is done by children and women. It is positive discourse for the ecofeminism ecosophy.

5.2. Ecofeminism and ecocentrism ecosophies

Ecofeminism is an ecosophy that is realised in all the five oral narratives (100%). Relationism (mutual dependency), equal rights, preservation/conservation and valuing living are all highlighted in the oral narratives, but our focus is on ecofeminism and ecocentrism. Ecofeminism opposes the oppression of women and other less powerful entities in the narratives. The fathers in Narratives 1, 2, 4, and 5 are all demonstrative of power dynamics whereby they exercise hegemonic masculinity against weaker entities. The father in Narrative 1 threatens the girls that if anyone broke their pot they would be taken to the Chief Ogre to be eaten. Yet on discovering his daughter had gone to the forest to be eaten we are told:

> He passed the second up to the sixth ogre but they all denied being Namunyu: 'No, no'. So he went deeper into the forest until he found Namunyu snoring like thunder under the tree. He threw his spear at him and killed him in his sleep.

In Narrative 2, Wanakhatandi hates his first wife as she had borne eight girls and no sons, so he offers the whole lot to the ogres to try and spare his own life. Similarly, in Narrative 4, the father threatens to divorce any of his wives if they gave birth to a girl, so Aela's mother who gives birth to twins abandons her in the forest to the fate of its occupants. In Narrative 5, the blacksmith leaves strict instructions about food and goes to dig for iron ore in the forest. These negative oppressive ideologies must be resisted as these ecosophies of ecofeminism and ecocentrism of necessity require consideration of all entities, living and non-living in the ecosphere (ecologism).

Women are seen to utilise nature resources carefully in these narratives. They collect dry twigs for firewood, collect wild fruits and herbs for food and medicine, collect water from the springs and wells, and generally avoid the depths of the forest. Unfortunately, the

wicked stepmother in Narrative 3 tries to poison her stepchild as she is greedy of inheriting all her husband's property for her own children. This materialism is a destructive, negative discourse that must be resisted.

Ecofeminism and ecocentrism also vouch for preservation and valuing living, which are found in each of the narratives. In Narrative 1, the water is to be carried carefully in pots ensuring the pots are not broken. Narrative 2 shows the mother hiding her family in the tree and not cooking them for the ogres. She refuses to kill her children, herself or her husband and devises a strategy of deceiving the ogres:

> Wanakhatandi's wife could not even think of the possibility of killing and cooking any of her daughters. So she collected carrion from starved animals and prepared them deliciously and fed them to the ogres. She discovered a big hole in a big tree where she hid each of the children until they were all hidden up.

This reminds us of Murmu and Pandey (2022, p. 12) who argue that "as a result of the cultural/historical association of women and nature, women become the figures of resistance to the androcentric exploitative and capitalistic discourse that postcolonial ecofeminism seeks to challenge and resist".

Narrative 3 shows the non-human entity, the cow, always warning the orphan boy not to eat poison. Narrative 4 clearly illustrates the other non-human, the ogre, nurturing the human baby until she grows up. He is rewarded by nomination by anthroponymy whereby a human name, Nasio, is given to him, giving him positive valence. Though this can be perceived as anthropocentrism, it can be argued that human beings have considered that the ogre can also be of their level and it is not only humans who can demonstrate positive values. Finally, in Narrative 5 the blacksmith warns against eating the poisonous pumpkin and also "resurrects" them using the *lufufu* (healing herbs). The women try to preserve life by feeding and nurturing their families, as also does Nasio, the more-than-human ogre.

As is common with ecofeminism, the non-humans are also important to life: entities on the earth are given prominence with an ecocentric leaning. In Narrative 1, the stream provides water for all the children and when the girl breaks her pot we see unexpected restraint and honesty in ogres. It is expected that the first ogre would have eaten the little girl but all the six were honest and referred her to Chief Ogre to be eaten. Narrative 3 depicts the tree as a haven of solace for Wanakhatandi's children whereby they are hidden by their mother and instead carrion from famine stricken animals is prepared for the ogres. Narrative 4 gives positive valence to Nasio, the ogre who nurtures a baby girl to life and grows to love her as his own daughter. When she goes missing, he misses her so much that he cries:

> 'Aela, my Aela!
> 'Aela, my Aela!
> He was so sorrowful that he could not do anything. He cried until he died of sorrow

> and starvation.

His grief is demonstrated in the repetition of her name in the mournful, loving song he sings for her. He dies of grief[2] and starvation when she returns to her home and he cannot find her anymore. This is positive discursive construction of an otherwise vile imagination in other oral narratives. It is a reversal of the usual discourse of the ogre eating humans. Narrative 5 portrays the bird as the saviour of the grim situation since when all the eighteen children die, it is the dove who takes the message to the blacksmith in the forest to come and revive his family. We are told:

> The dove flew west and sang her song as she went along. Finally she landed on a tree near where Kasawa was and repeated the song. The men who were with Kasawa told him to listen to what the bird was singing. Soon he followed the bird through the forest to his home.

In contrast to the ecocentrism, anthropocentrism, which places the human beings above other entities in the ecosphere, is evident in four of the narratives. It is not surprising since human beings have always considered themselves in charge of the universe both from the religious and social quarters. They feel that the other entities in the universe are supposed to be at the service of human beings. Thus, Narrative 3 is surprising in this aspect since noesis is given to the cow. The cow is the one that saves the boy by always singing to him about which food to eat and which to avoid in order to preserve his life. This anthropomorphism gives preponderance to a non-human which moves away from anthropocentrism.

Ecofeminism aspires to ensure justice for all marginalised and oppressed beings whether human or not. In line with this, we see ecological justice in all but Narrative 4. Nature appears wroth with human beings due to some reason not given. But with intertextuality from other sources nature has been hurt by anthropogenic activities resulting in droughts and famines in Narrative 3 and 5. In Narrative 1, it is unfair for the Chief Ogre to be killed, yet it is the girl who has taken herself to him as threatened by her father. Narrative 2 shows ambivalence in justice: if it is true that anthropogenic activities have contributed to drought then the ogres leave the forest to avoid starvation and feed on all human beings. Wanakhatandi sacrifices his entire first family but the ogres still make the chimerical demand that he cooks himself for them. It is only the compassion of his eldest daughter that saves him. Narrative 3 allows the wicked stepmother to be divorced and sent

[2] There is ambivalence here in this particular ogre since it seems contradictory that the ogre is good, but we are happy that he died in the end. Nasio does not portray "typical" ogre characteristics including greed and being a danger to human beings. Nevertheless, in other stories one who protects something dangerous to them suffers. Like in one story a woman hid a hyena from hunters and it later on ate her up. Nasio was good but he was also waiting for Aela to grow bigger to be eaten. That's the dilemma of the story.

packing when it is revealed by the cow that she is trying to poison the innocent orphan boy.

From this ecolinguistic analysis, it is clear that the Luhya narratives demonstrate normal life where there is the axiological expectation of relationism, with no one story being exclusively ecocentric or anthropocentric. There is biospherical egalitarianism: a balance in the interaction of human beings and other non-human beings. This is unlike modern society which is highly anthropocentric with nature being at the service of human beings. Nature is either their food or entertainment. This analysis thus agrees with ecolinguistics which also aims to analyse indigenous communities for lessons on harmonious co-existence of humans and other beings. For instance, Kemmerer (2006) argues for alternative lexical items to describe our co-existence since expressions like "the way people treat animals" is misleading because it tells a story that humans are not animals who depend on other entities in the environment for survival (as cited in Stibbe, 2018, p. 4). Kemmerer therefore proposes the new term "anymal" which refers to "all animals, unique and diverse, marvellous and complex, who do not happen to be *homo sapiens*". Levesque (2016, p. 534) urges that respectful interspecies communities should prevail in this "convironment".

6. Conclusion

As Stibbe (2021a) indicates, ecolinguistics is useful for giving positive valence to all the entities human beings co-exist with in the ecosphere. In fact, human beings are an inherent part of the "convironment" and need to nurture it for their own survival. We need to critically examine the stories we live by, eradicate the negative ones and the negative elements in the ambivalent ones, and highlight the positive ones, sharing them with other cultures for the benefit of all occupants of the universe. Language is very important in achieving this cause since it is the means by which these ideologies are communicated and responded to. Language must be properly utilised so as to communicate the true picture of the ecosphere.

Analysis of these indigenous African oral narratives sheds light on Shepard Krech III's (1999) argument that challenges the "myth" that indigenous American communities lived harmoniously with nature. We have shown here that overall, ecocentrism was highly valued and it is true that the African indigenous communities did live harmoniously with nature. Their hunting and extraction of resources was limited and not for sport or waste but for day to day living as we need each other to live on this universe. Anthroponyms were used to give names to ogres such as *Nasio*, and even the pumpkins in Narrative 5 are called *Namikasa* and *Wanandolo*. All these added value to more-than-humans.

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