

Ecological Discourse Analysis of “the Little Prince”

Cao Yujuan

Shanxi Normal University, Linfen 041000, China

Keywords: The little prince, Ecological discourse analysis, Ecological philosophy

Abstract: “The Little Prince” is a famous children’s literary short story written by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in 1942. It tells the various adventures that the little prince went through during the journey from his planet to the earth. The author selects the article as a corpus for research, and conducts an ecological discourse analysis from the perspective of ecological linguistics. The purpose is to analyze the ecological philosophy concepts conveyed by the discourse and to realize the harmonious coexistence between people.

1. Introduction

“*The Little Prince*” is a famous fairy tale although it is just the author’s work in three months, it has a profound and creative background. It is the accumulation of the author’s life and emotions over the years, or even decades. It is not only a fairy tale for children, but also the “crystallization” of philosophy and thinking, full of insights about life.

The author tries to reread this classical discourse from the perspective of ecolinguistics, in order to let more people pay attention to the ecological balance of language, because the ecological environment is the basic condition for language development, with a good ecological environment, language development and language protection will have basic guarantees, the balance of language ecology will ensure the balance of cultural ecology, and the sustainable development of human society.

2. Ecolinguistics and Ecological Discourse Analysis

2.1 Definition of Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics is a new discipline developed in recent decades and it has attracted more and more attention of scholars. When it comes to the definition of “ecolinguistics”, many people think that ecolinguistics is simply the addition of ecology and linguistics or linguistics and ecology, but it is not. Alwin Fill pointed out as early as 2001: Ecolinguistics is a study which goes far beyond syntax, semantics and pragmatics and which therefore requires some new theorizing as well as innovative ideas concerning empirical investigation. (Alwin Fill, 2001).

From above, the author can try to sum up the following point of view: Ecolinguistics is based on ecology and linguistics, but it is not only a simple combination of the two concepts, it is the integration of the two concepts at a cross level. The purpose is to better reflect and solve ecological problems through language level.

In the book *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By*, the definition of ecolinguistics is explained as follows: ‘The ecosophy of this book’, but for now we can say that the ‘eco’ of the form of ecolinguistics described in this book refers to: 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 wellbeing and survival; The ‘linguistics’ of the form of ecolinguistics described in this book uses a variety of linguistic theories to analyze patterns in language in an attempt to reveal the underlying stories-we-live-by, as a step towards changing them.(Stibbe, A. 2015)

The author narrowly believes that ecolinguistics is a discipline that studies ecological problems from the perspective of linguistics, and tries to improve people’s ecological awareness through language forms, so as to better solve ecological problems.

2.2 The Connotation of Ecological Discourse Analysis

Huang Guowen and Zhao Ruihua (2017) pointed out: Eco-discourse analysis includes the analysis of ecological discourse and the ecological analysis of discourse. It focuses on ecological discourse, while the latter is the study of ecological factors in various discourses, which can be extended to the study of ecological and non-ecological factors in language systems. The author’s ecological discourse analysis of “*The Little Prince*” from the perspective of ecological linguistics focuses on the latter, namely the ecological analysis of discourse, including the study of ecological and non-ecological factors in the discourse, thereby revealing what ecological view the article may convey.

Nowadays, ecolinguistics and ecological discourse analysis have attracted more and more attention of scholars. They try to arouse people’s ecological awareness and social responsibility through the use of language, and guide people to alleviate or improve the ecological problems they encounter, so as to realize human harmony and unity with nature and environment.

3. Text Analysis

3.1 Ideologies and Discourse

Stibbe believes that from the perspective of ecolinguistics, discourse can be divided into three categories: destructive discourses, ambivalent discourses and beneficial discourses. Destructive discourses refer to the contradiction between the worldview and ideology conveyed by a certain discourse and the eco-philosophy of the analyst; beneficial discourses are the worldview and ideology conveyed by a discourse consistent with the ecological philosophy of the analyst; ambivalent discourses are discourses between these two categories, on the one hand, the worldview and ideology conveyed are consistent with the eco-philosophy of the analyst, and on the other hand, there are inconsistencies or conflicts, while these discourses have a positive aim of dealing with some of the ecological problems caused by destructive discourses, they arise from the same society as the destructive discourses and may be influenced by political or commercial interests(Stibbe, A. 2015).

In chapter 1, “*The grown-ups’ response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors...devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter. I had been disheartened by the failure of my Drawing Number One and my Drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understanding anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.*”^[1] These sentences are destructive discourse, grown-ups’ indifference, incomprehension and lack of support have shattered children’s dream of becoming a

painter, grown-ups always ask children with their own opinions, children are too tired to explain to them, so they have to give up their dream. In fact, grown-ups should learn to communicate with children, respect their ideas, hobbies, and lifestyle and give them a happy childhood.

In the book, the little prince mentioned “*these grown-ups are so strange*” ^[1] at least 4 times. This sentence is ambivalent discourse. From the perspective of the little prince, he felt that the thinking of adults is incomprehensible, and simple things are often complicated, so it is strange; but from the perspective of adults, they think it is normal and they think about issues more comprehensively. Readers should be guided to think positively, even if grown-ups are “strange”, it is not a derogatory term. It is necessary to understand adults and communicate with them friendly.

Compare the two sentences in Chapter 4 of the book: *If you were to say to the grown-ups: “I saw a beautiful house made of rosy brick, with geraniums in the windows and doves on the roof...”*; “*I saw a house that costs \$20000...what a pretty house that is!*” ^[1] Obviously the first sentence is a beneficial discourse, “I”, “House”, “Brick”, “Geranium”, and “Dove”, both human and human beings, animals, plants and places are living together, it is a picture of harmonious coexistence, nature and tranquility; the latter sentence is a destructive discourse, which puts the house on the price of \$20000, and it could make a bad influence because of this mark that this house looks beautiful, which is typical of money worship and can easily mislead people’s worldview.

In real life, people should avoid using destructive discourses, and try to make ambivalent discourses into beneficial discourses, in order to realize the harmonious relationship between people, to live in harmony.

3.2 Frames and Framing

A frame is a story about an area of life that is brought to mind by particular trigger words. Framing is the use of a story from one area of life (a frame) to structure how another area of life is conceptualised. Reframing is the act of framing a concept in a way that is different from its typical framing in a culture. (Stibbe, A. 2015)

Chapter 1, the 6-year-old “I” in mind expresses the wonderful scene in his two pictures. In the first picture, a boa constrictor is swallowing an elephant. “I” showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. But they answered: “Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?” My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. ^[1] Everyone thinks it is a hat. This is the frame formed by the adult’s inherent life experience.



“I” was very upset: I clearly painted a boa constrictor digesting an elephant, but the adults couldn’t appreciate it, so “I” had to draw the inside of the boa constrictor’s belly so that they could understand.



But even so, the adults still don't understand "I", "*The grown-ups' response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar.*"^[1] They think that painting is useless, and "I" should spend more time learning geography, history, arithmetic and grammar, and this has killed "I" to become a painter.

This is also the same with adults in educating their children: many parents usually think their children can't distinguish whether things are good or not, and they always impose children to accept what they think is good and useful, and impose the thinking framework in their brain on their children. This is what adults believe in and practice story. Adults are accustomed to putting themselves in the role of leader, and they are used to putting themselves in the role of the actor in the spoken sentences, regardless of the role of the participant. This is not ecological. Parents should change their thinking framework and communication mode, reframing another concept in a way that is different from the former one, and communicate with children so as to achieve the balance between them and the balance between language, and to realize the harmonious relationship between people.

3.3 Identity

An identity is a story in people's minds about what it means to be a particular kind of person, including appearance, character, behavior and values. A self-identity is an evolving story people tell themselves and others about what kind of person they are (Stibbe, A. 2015).

At the beginning of Chapter 2, "*So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to,*"^[1] the author described the problem of "I": "Living alone", without real friends, walking in his own world. "I" came to the Sahara Desert due to a plane failure and met the little prince, the protagonist of the fairy tale, and the friend whom "I" would eventually meet. He could understand the picture a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant drawn by "I". And he asked "I" to draw a sheep, when I used normal thinking to draw it, "I" was failure to accept. However, when "I" lost patience and drew a box perfunctorily, saying that the sheep was inside, "I" was recognized by the little prince.

Although "I" and the little prince are from different planets, with different ages and backgrounds, they can overcome these differences, understand each other, and live in harmony. On the other hand, people from the same region and background around "I" cannot identify with each other. This proves that people can break the social elements of places. "I" and the little prince became good friends precisely because they recognized and believed in some stories, and these stories became their codes of conduct. "I" and the little prince used these rules to guide their language practice and behavior.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis of "*The Little Prince*" aims to criticize those stories that destroy the systems

that life depends on, and advocate stories that are beneficial to the survival of humans and non-living entities, in order to explore new credible and practical stories. However, there are still many deficiencies in the exploratory study of ecolinguistics, which are left to be further criticized and corrected by scholars.

Last but not the least, with the continuous development of society, the better combination of theory and practice makes the theory more persuasive and the articles more real, and in the future there will be more and more scholars studying ecolinguistics, expecting the future scholars to add more case studies based on theories and find more beneficial stories of ecological balance.

References

- [1] Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince* [M].
- [2] Alwin Fill. 2001. *The Ecolinguistics Readers: Language, Ecology and Environment*[M].
- [3] Fan Junjun. 2005. *Review of Ecolinguistics Research* [J]. *Foreign Languages Teaching and Research* (Bimonthly).
- [4] Stibbe, A. 2015. *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live by* [M]. London: Routledge.
- [5] Huang Guowen. Zhao Ruihua. 2017. *The origins, goals, principles and methods of ecological discourse analysis*[J]. *Modern Foreign Languages* (Bimonthly).