



An Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis of Sustainability Narratives in Selected Excerpts from Piers Torday's *The Last Wild*

تحليل الخطاب النقدي البيئي لسرديات الاستدامة في مقتطفات مختارة من رواية البرية الأخيرة

Lect. Duaa Hafidh Hussein

Wasit University-College of Arts

Email: duhusain@uowasit.edu.iq

م. دعاء حافظ حسين

جامعة واسط كلية الآداب

Abstract

This paper is an Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis (ECDA henceforth) of some excerpts of *The Last Wild* 2013, a children's novel by Piers Torday. It focuses on how the text builds and negotiates the discourses of environmental sustainability, extinction, and human-nature relationships using linguistic decisions. The present study has determined several key discursive strategies, which are metaphor, transitivity, narrative voice, that help readers to conceptualize ecological problems. The reading shows a dominating anthropocentric discourse that is at the same time confronted by a strong ecological counter-argument that focuses on the protagonist, Kester Jaynes, and the voice of the rest of fauna. The results show that, as a dystopian that is critical, *The Last Wild* uses linguistic mechanisms to promote an ecocentric worldview, and promote the ecological stewardship in its juvenile audience. The present paper thus contributes to the emerging research on the topic of eco-fiction in children and the use of ECDA as a method of literary analysis.

المستخلص

هذه الدراسة هي عبارة عن تحليل خطاب نقدي بيئي لبعض المقتطفات من رواية البرية الأخيرة ٢٠١٣، رواية الاطفال من قبل بيريس توردي. حيث تركز الدراسة على كيفية بناء النص والتفاوض على خطابات الاستدامة البيئية، الانقراض وعلاقات الطبيعة البشرية باستخدام القرارات اللغوية. اظهرت الدراسة الحالية استراتيجيات خطاب رئيسية عديدة منها الاستعارة، الانتقالية، الحس السردى التي تساعد القراء على تصور المشاكل البيئية. تُظهر القراءة خطاباً أنثروبوسينترياً مهيماً، يواجه في الوقت نفسه حجة بيئية مضادة قوية تُركز على بطل الرواية، كيستر جاينز، وصوت بقية الحيوانات. تظهر النتائج أن رواية "البرية الأخيرة"، باعتبارها رواية ديستوبية ناقدة، تستخدم آليات لغوية لتعزيز رؤية عالمية مركزية بيئية، وتعزيز الإدارة البيئية لدى جمهورها من الأطفال. وبالتالي، تُسهم هذه الورقة البحثية في إظهار الأبحاث الناشئة حول موضوع الخيال البيئي لدى الاطفال باستخدام تحليل الخطاب النقدي البيئي كوسيلة للتحليل الأدبي.



Keywords: Discourse Analysis, CDA, ECDA, Children's Literature, *The Last Wild* Novel.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب, تحليل الخطاب النقدي, ادب الأطفال, رواية البرية الأخيرة.

1. Introduction

The growing environmental crisis in the world has made it necessary to subject to a strict discussion the discourses that form human understanding of nature and sustainability (Stibbe, 2015). Literature, and children literature in particular, is relevant in the socialization of readers to certain opinions of the world, which also encompass ecologically-informed opinions (Goga, 2011).

Besides, *The Last Wild* (2013) by Piers Torday is one of the recent shining lights of eco-fiction in which an incurable disease called Red Eye has wiped out all the flora, making the world sterile and controlled in favor of the human race. The novel is traced through the adventures of the main character, a twelve-year-old boy, Kester Jaynes, who learns that he has the ability to communicate with the remaining few animals and thus he goes out on a mission to save the animals and through them, the planet. The paper aims to subject the use of ECDA to the specific passages of the book, *The Last Wild*, in order to reveal its ideological and discursive strategies used in developing its sustainability discourses. The aim of the research undertaken is to answer the following questions:

1. How is the interdependence between the human and the nature discursively articulated in the text?
2. What are the language features that are used to describe the environmental disaster and the concept of sustainability?
3. How does the narrative voice of the novel promote an ecocentric or an anthropocentric ideology?

Moreover, this paper will be structured as follows: Section 2: will provide the review of the relevant literature on Ecocriticism, Ecolinguistics and CDA. Section 3: describes the approach to methodology, which involves the principles of ECDA and criteria of the selection of textual samples. Section 4: shows the data analysis with the focus on the prominent discursive characteristics. Section 5: is the discussion of findings with regards to the research questions, whereas Section 6: brings to an end the study with a conclusion of findings and recommendation to be made in future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Eco Literary Criticism and Children's Literature



As an academic field of study, eco-criticism is a systematic exploration of the intersection of literary works and natural nature, which is based on the domain of literary and cultural study (Glottfelty and Fromm, 1996). Its key objective is to question how the issue of environmental concerns can be represented in narrative and issue the possibility of literature to create ecological awareness. The use of eco-criticism in children literature is more likely to prefigure the themes of nature and wildness, and the authors must demand ethical responsibilities by young heroes of the text to the non-human worlds (Waheed, 2021). *The Last Wild* is commonly placed in the eco-dystopia sub-genre, in which a dystopian future is used to criticize how we use the environment today, and at the same time, provide us hope of a future change (Moylan, 2000). The main complaint of the novel, the extinction of animals, and the designated ability of the protagonist to communicate with animals, is in compliance with the ecocentric postulates of deep ecology, which posit the intrinsic value of all living things, irrespective of their utilitarian importance to humans (Naess, 1973).

2.2 Eco-linguistics and ECDA

Ecolinguistics is an inter-disciplinary area, which examines the contribution of language to the essential processes in human beings with other species and the natural environment at large (Stibbe, 2007). This field argues that language is not only a vehicle of communication that is neutral but is a powerful force that dictates ecological perception and practices. Most ecolinguistics, in particular, draws upon the conceptual language of so-called stories we live by, the unconscious, usually harmful stories that get inscribed in the language and that shape our behavior towards the environment (Stibbe, 2012).

In addition, ECDA is a combination of both ecolinguistics and CDA. The main aim of CDA, which is connected most with the names of scholars like Norman Fairclough, is to reveal the ideological power structures that are usually hidden in the discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Besides, ECDA is using this analysis model to the environmental field, exploring the way discourses build legitimacy, challenge or legitimise existing environmental ideologies, such as anthropocentrism and technocentrism (Torday, 2013). The systematic analysis of the linguistic features is often a part of the ECDA approach, and it can be outlined in the following way:

- a) **Metaphor:** The discovery of conceptual metaphors with the help of which environmental issues are assigned to specific ontological frames, like the interpretation of Nature as a Mechanism or the interpretation of The Earth as a Commodity.



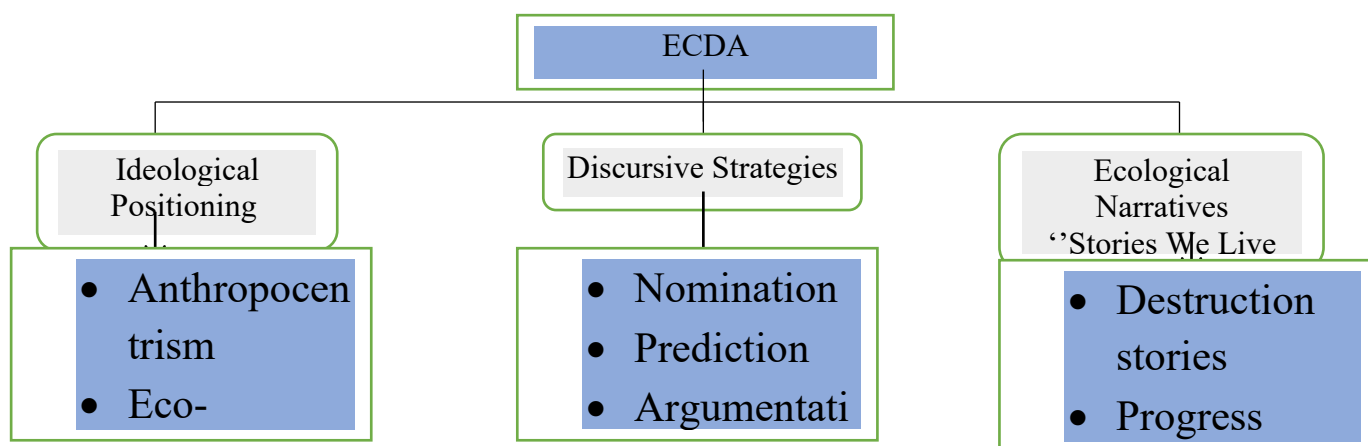
- b) **Transitivity:** A slight analysis of linguistic procedures, actions, situations and the roles (performers, aims, recipients) allocated to both human and non-human performers.
- c) **Modality:** A study of language in relation to certainty, obligation, and possibility, which will shed some light on how the author or characters of the story view environmental action.
- d) **Lexical Choices:** A more thorough analysis of the words that were used to describe nature, wildlife and ecological problems. In the past, ECDA studies have mostly focused on political speeches, media discourse, and textbooks (Triyono, 2023). Therefore, the application of ECDA to textual literature, specifically to children eco-fiction, provides a unique chance to solve the mystery of how ecological ideals are implicitly represented in the form of the narrative, its structure, and the voice of the characters.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The current study has the methodology of a qualitative, interpretive approach based on the ECDA. The theoretical framework used is largely based on Stibbe (2012) Ecolinguistics along with the tri-dimensional perspective of CDA by Fairclough (1995), consequently in the literary domain, still, modified according to the criteria of this study: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The critical interest is put into the textual aspect, which serves to address the linguistic features of chosen passages of the novel and align them with the discursive practices of children eco-fiction, and the discourse of the environment in general (See Figure 1):

Figure1: ECDA Components of Sustainability Analysis



3.2. Data Selection

The dataset of this research is composed of selected sections of Piers Torday carefully elected in his book *The Last Wild*. Therefore, to target the



passages that best reveal the underlying themes of sustainability and ideological conflicts of the novel, a selective sampling approach was used (See Table 1 and 2).

Table 1: Criteria of Selected Experts

No	Criteria	Brief Description of Selected Experts
1.	Genre	The data of analysis are literary texts. The researcher has chosen three experts which are emphasized on the concept of sustainability.
2.	Theme	The main theme of the selected experts in this study is the concept of environmental sustainability.
3.	Form	All the selected experts are literary data which are presented in different sections in the novel.
4.	Source or Reference	The Novel of <i>The Last Wild</i> by Piers Torday (2013).

Table 2: Description of Selected Experts for ECDA Analysis of Sustainability

No.	Category of Selected Experts	Description
1.	Excerpt 1: (Description of the Outside World)	This expert accounts of the dystopian landscape with no animals, along with the sterilized and controlled environment of the human enclave, hence representative of the existing anthropocentric discourse.
2.	Excerpt 2: (Kester's Initial Correspondence)	These sections that show how Kester first becomes aware of his communicative powers with the remaining creatures thus being used to symbolize the emergence of an ecocentric counter-narrative
3.	Excerpt 3: (Antagonist's Justification)	Those experts where the speeches of the opponents or their inner thoughts are discussed, and the opponents represent the powers within the environment of degradation and



domination, thus, representing the technocentric/exploitative narrative.

3.3 Analytical Methodology

The ECDA technique was performed in different major stages:

- a) **Close Interpretation:** Each excerpt was sensibly observed in order to comprehend its narrative determination and the situation in which it happens in the novel.
- b) **Analysis of language:** The texts were systematically analyzed with regard to the key language features that would be relevant in ECDA.
- c) **Transitivity Analysis:** Recognition of processes (material, mental, relational), participants (Actors, Goals) to determine the dynamics of action (e.g. humans acting upon nature or nature acting upon humans).
- d) **Metaphor Analysis:** Classifying and abstracting the most common abstract metaphors used to designate the environment, fauna, and the ailment methodically.
- e) **Lexical and Evaluative Analysis:** An analysis of the choice of words (lexis) and the explicit or implicit judgment of value (evaluation), which is related to human actions and the natural world.
- f) **Ideological Understanding:** The linguistic results were inspected with a view of recognizing the underlying ecological principles (technocentrism, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism) and the ideological attitude of the description towards sustainability.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Discourse of the Dystopian Realm: Anthropocentrism and Domination

The setting of the novel is established straight away due to an absence and domination dialogue. The surrounding of the facility, which was previously alive, is referred to through terms that underline the lack of life and superiority of humans.

Excerpt 1: (Description of the Outside World):

"The world was grey. Grey roads, grey buildings, grey sky. The only colour was the dull, metallic sheen of the Control vehicles and the bright, unnatural green of



the Synthetic grass in the Central Enclosure. The animals were gone, replaced by efficient systems and sanitized living." (Torday, 2013)

Analysis:

- a) Lexical Selections: Words like efficient, Control, Synthetic, Enclosure, and sanitized produce a semantic space anticipating human created order and insincerity. The frequent grey draws an indication of a scenery that is depressed of inherent life.
- b) Metaphorical Construction: The prevailing metaphor is that of Nature as a Machine or a System to be controlled. The environment is depicted using language not as an organism but as a set of processes that can be substituted or improved with the help of technology.
- c) Responsibility Omission: The text portrays extinction of creatures as being a passive process in which they simply disappeared but not murdered. Such form of construction consciously denies any human responsibility of direct culpability, thus weakening the accountability.
- d) Voice and Transitivity: The Rise of the Ecocentric Counter-Narrative. The fact that Kester is able to talk to the animals represents an important shift in the anthropocentric discourse to an ecocentric counter-discourse.

4.2. The Rise of the Ecocentric Counter-Narrative

Excerpt 2: (Kester's Initial Correspondence):

"A small, frantic voice, not in his ears, but in his mind, screamed: Help us! They are coming! He looked down. A tiny, terrified pigeon, its eyes a shocking, vibrant red, was staring up at him. The pigeon was the Actor in a material process of screaming and a mental process of staring." (Torday, 2013)

Analysis:

- a) Transitivity: In the mainstream account, animals are in most cases seen as the Objectives of humans. Material processes (e.g., human beings end animals). The Actor in a material process (screamed) and a psychological process (staring) is the pigeon. This grammatical choice bestows agency and personality on the non-human organism, which is a key postulate of ecocentrism.
- b) Lexical and Evaluative Analysis: The voice in the poem is described as being frantic and the pigeon is described as being terrified, using anthropomorphic emotional language. Such anthropomorphism language is a discursive mode of development to empathize and break the human-animal dichotomy, which makes the suffering of the animal familiar to the reader.



- c) Modality: The communication by the animal, which is, Assist us! "They are coming!" is a direct command, and exerts a special duty on the human hero, Kester, and by implication on the reader. vegetation in the Central Enclosure. The dominating metaphor is Nature as a Machine or Nature as a System to be Regulated. Environment is not a living organism, it is rather a set of processes which can be replaced and improved by human technology.
- d) Absence of Intervention: The animals are defined as simply disappearing, which is a passive construction that does not acknowledge the human activity directly in the procedure of extermination. This omission in the words decreases human responsibility.

4.3. The Antagonist's Discourse: Technocentrism and Exploitation

The villains, who represent the power that established the barren world, implement the technocentric discourse along with the economic rationalization to justify their actions

Excerpt 3: (Antagonist's Justification):

"The disease was a necessary evil. We purified the environment. We removed the inefficiencies of the wild. Now, we have stability, predictability, and profit. The animals were simply a liability; their extinction was an economic inevitability." (Torday, 2013)

Analysis:

- a) Transitivity: The antagonists are the Actors of a series of material processes (e.g., 'purified,' 'removed') towards environmental and biological objects (the Goals). The use of these verbs brings out the destruction of nature as a positive, planned, and beneficial activity.
- b) Metaphor: The environment is clearly theorized as a Business Model or Economic System. Animals are made to be seen as liabilities and the elimination of animals is shown as economically unavoidable. This is a typical example of the pernicious discourse that we subscribe to and the value of nature is measured by money or its usefulness (Stibbe, 2012).
- c) Evaluative language: The such expressions like necessary evil, stability, predictability, and profit are used as positive assessor phrases in order to justify the destruction of the environment. This debate aims at legitimizing and justifying ecological degradation in the interest of gaining human economic gain.



5. Findings and Results

This analysis employed in the given work shows that there is a complex interaction of competing ecological ideologies, which is why it is important in the context of the overall discourse of sustainability in the novel.

5.1 The Human-Nature Relationship Development

This paper describes the human nature-nature relationship in two different and contrary ways:

- a) **Dominating Anthropocentric/Technocentric Discourse:** This aspect of the description is typified by a dystopian environment and a vocabulary of vile-like rhetoric and defines nature as a product, a machine to be seized and as something that hinders the development of humankind. Topics of language such as passive constructions, economic comparisons, and human-as-agent transitivity are used to naturalize the process of extinction and cloud the issue of human culpability. It reminds of the statement that the disease was a necessary evil. Besides, the text stresses on the improvement of the environmental quality, the eradication of the natural inefficiency, and the attainment of the stability, predictability, and profitability. In this view, animals are nothing but liabilities whose elimination is the economic necessity. These sections put economic and technological human ambitions above the ecological wellbeing (Stibbe, 2007).
- b) **Emerging Ecocentric Counter Discourses:** Kester and the animals are the best examples of this counter-narrative. The text restores a moral and affectionate relationship between the human hero and the non-human world by transitivity, emotive and anthropomorphic diction in attributing agency to non-human beings (Naess, 1973).

5.2 The Presentation of Environmental Crisis and Sustainability

The issue of environment is not presented as an actual situation but also as a fictional discourse. The novel illustrates the ways in which the crisis is concealed and justified by rhetoric that places a premium on efficiency, control and profitability. Sustainability is implicitly perceived as a denial of the anthropocentric paradigm and a re-establishment of the non-human agency. This text assumes that to be truly sustainable does not merely mean skin-deep management of its resources but a radical change in the worldview that views nature as distinct and inferior to human beings, a radical ecological change. Using the critical dystopia school of thought, the story takes place in the worst-case



scenario to create the warning and urgency, which in turn provokes the reader to act. The dystopian world acts as a strong negative metaphor of the effects of unfettered anthropocentrism and thus promotes a positive, sustainable alternative (Moylan, 2000).

5.3 Narrative Viewpoint and Ideology Promotion

The narrative voice in *The Last Wild* serves as a decisive means of advocacy of ideology. Therefore, the descriptions at the beginning of the scene are carried in a detached and somewhat scientific manner, thus creating a sense of an antiseptic surrounding, followed by the transition to a much more emotive and engaged pitch thereafter as Kester interacts with the animals. Such a swing of tone and outlook forces the reader to take the ecocentric worldview. Besides, the effectiveness of the novel as eco-fiction is based on its ability to utilize the linguistic means as one of the discursive interventions. The language of animals by Torday directly challenges the linguistic exclusion of the non-human world, which is a feature of anthropocentrism discourse (Abbamonte, 2021). This literary device is a very strong example of Positive Discourse Analysis, where the narrative is intentionally developed as positive and environmentally friendly (Stibbe, 2006).

6. Conclusion and Prospective Research

This ECDA of some experts in Piers Torday's novel *The Last Wild* reveals the advanced use of language and plot techniques to both develop and propagate a major ecological sustainability story. It is apparent in the analysis that there is an apparent collision of ideologies between the overarching anthropocentric/technocentric story of the dystopian environment and the new ecocentric counter-story represented by the protagonist and the animals. The novel uses certain linguistic tools, such as the intentional application of transitivity to assign an agency to non-human actors, incorporation of economic metaphors to criticize exploitation, and moderation of narrative voice to promote empathy, to challenge harmful narratives in which we exist, and promote a fundamental change in our relationships with nature. *The Last Wild* demonstrates the ways in which the discourse of ecological advocacy can be conveyed by children using eco-fiction. Further studies might improve the analysis by performing a full-text ECDA of the whole novel, which would enable moving the sustainability discourse through the trilogy. Also, the analysis of discursive strategies used in the book *The Last Wild* and the contemporary eco-fiction of children might shed light on the existing tendencies in the genre. Lastly, the evaluation of the acceptance of these ecological discourses among young readers



through empirical research would be of good information on the effectiveness of their pedagogical application.

References

- Abbamonte, L. (2021). The “sustainable” video-narratives of Greenpeace: An ecolinguistic investigation. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 57(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqab001>
- Chan, M. (2025). Speech and silence in contemporary children’s literature: Giving voice to the non-human. *International Research in Children’s Literature*, 18(1), 1–15.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Glottfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Goga, N. (2011). The representation of nature in children’s literature. *Children’s Literature in Education*, 42(4), 303–317. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-011-9141-0>
- Moylan, T. (2000). *Scraps of the untainted sky: Science fiction, utopia, dystopia*. Westview Press.
- Naess, A. (1973). The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. *Inquiry*, 16(1–4), 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201747308601682>
- Stibbe, A. (2006). Towards a positive discourse analysis of the ecological crisis. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 5(2), 199–221. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.5.2.05sti>
- Stibbe, A. (2007). Language, power and the ecological crisis. *Language & Ecology*, 2(1).
- Stibbe, A. (2012). The stories we live by. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 43(4), 267–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2012.719454>
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. Routledge.
- Torday, P. (2013). *The last wild*. Quercus Publishing.
- Triyono, S. (2023). Ecological discourse and environmental education in English textbooks: A multimodal eco-critical discourse analysis. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 8(3), 687–700. <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v8i3.1185>
- Waheed, F. (2021). Deep ecology and the rhetoric of critical dystopia in Piers Torday’s *The Last Wild*. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 5(1), 122–133. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2021\(5-I\)10](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2021(5-I)10)