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**‘Wild through Words’: An Ecolinguistic Investigation of Salience and  
Evaluation in Disney’s *The Lion King***



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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the salience and evaluation in the animated movie *The Lion King* to discover the lexical choices related to ecology in the movie. To achieve these objectives, the model of ecolinguistics presented by Stibbe (2015) was employed. There are many areas of life that are magnified and appraisal patterns are also found throughout the plot of the movie. This study has adopted a mixed-methods research approach and uses purposive sampling while collecting data. Transcript of the movie *The Lion King* was used to analyze the data. After the analysis it has been found that the movie was teemed with lexical choices that have relation to environment and ecology and many nouns, noun phrases, verbs and adjectives are evidence of this connection. Moreover, it is discovered that the movie not only contain countless appraisal patterns but also try to put light on many aspects of environment and ecology. It is also found that magnification of various areas of life is quite apparent in the transcripts. The appraisal patterns here point to the positive or negative evaluation and salience refers to the prominence of things, individuals and notions. It is also suggested that the movie can be studied for erasure and other ecofeministic elements in future.

**Keywords:** Wild, Words, Ecolinguistics, Salience, Evaluation

**Introduction**

There is hardly any debate among linguistic scholars that language is the most effective tool to influence the perceptions of individuals and societies. Language was begun to be studied in scientific terms with the emergence of Linguistics and many gifted scholars worked on the various aspects of communication systems. Although the word ‘linguistics’ was first used in the first part of the nineteenth century, the research on the language has been going on for many centuries. During this time, many new subfields originated out of this. Linguistics covered almost all of them and even literature which some may want to be studied and analyzed separately. Not many of those scholars, who worked on language and linguistics, thought of language’s relation to nature and physical surroundings. Ecology was thought to be something that may not have any logical connection with language. According to Haeckel (1886), “Ecology is the study of the relationship of the organisms with their environment”. This definition doesn’t show any link between language and ecology. Similarly, Language and linguistics were never studied in relation to environment and surroundings. However, all that changed with emergence of ecolinguistics.

Haugen (1972), defined ecology of language as “The study interactions between any given language and its environment” Halliday (1990), linked several environmental problems to applied linguistics This astonishing claim raised quite a few eyebrows but many scholars started investigating into the phenomena. International Ecolinguistics Association defines Ecolinguistics as “Ecolinguistics explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment”. Stibbe (2015) presented a model containing many theories about ecolinguistics. He challenges many beliefs about language and environment in his writings. As scope of ecolinguistics expanded, it gave rise to many opportunities of

studying it in different contexts and in various fields of life. One of those opportunities is investigating the texts of environmental and nature-based movies. Ecolinguistics studies were mostly done on the environmental aspects of the literary texts. However, TV and films played a leading role in talking about and showing nature and natural surroundings. This thing attracted the attention of many researchers who were looking for a chance to discover relation between language and its physical surroundings.

Over the years, watching the movies has not something been odd in most cultures of the world but animated movies were never very popular among film-lovers in the past as they have become these days. Most of the viewers watch the movie for recreational purposes and don't bother to think about these films more than this. Some movies seem to have moral lessons or they seem to be made to create awareness in views about certain issues. But the language and physical environments used in the movies can have underlying ideas and motives that producers and writers may want to achieve through these films. These underlying ideas can be intentional or unintentional on part of the creators of the movie. This research will try to unfold those ideas and the possible aims behind them. As children are more attracted to the movie, they are more prone to undergo mindset changes because of the movie. These issues lead the researchers of language to the conclusion that the movie need to be scrutinize and examined in order to expose the underlying motives present in the movie.

### **Statement of Problem**

Despite growing concern over climate change and ecological degradation, popular culture—particularly animated films—continues to shape public perceptions of human–nature relationships. Disney's *The Lion King* (1994 and 2019 versions), with its iconic “Circle of Life” narrative, is one of the most influential environmental stories ever told to global audiences, yet the precise linguistic and semiotic mechanisms through which it constructs ecological meaning remain underexplored. While previous ecolinguistic research drawing on Stibbe's (2015) framework has predominantly examined erasure, metaphor, and framing, the interrelated roles of salience (what is foregrounded or backgrounded in discourse) and appraisal/evaluation (how entities and relationships are positively or negatively judged) have received far less attention. This is particularly significant in *The Lion King*, where language, song lyrics, visual composition, and characterisation work together to celebrate ecological interdependence while simultaneously naturalising hierarchies of dominance and anthropocentric control. The present study addresses this gap by applying Stibbe's (2015) concepts of salience and appraisal to reveal the beneficial and destructive “stories we live by” embedded in the film, thereby uncovering how one of the most beloved ecological narratives in popular culture both promotes and undermines life-sustaining relationships with the more-than-human world.

### **Research Objectives**

To identify the lexical choices used in *The Lion King* analogous to ecology of language

To analyze the various salience patterns used to magnify certain areas of life in the selected movie

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To analyze the different appraisal structures employed in the selected movie to represent particular phenomena positively or negatively

## **Research Questions**

What are the lexical choices used in The Lion King analogous to ecology of language?

How are various salience structures used to magnify certain areas of life in the selected movie?

How are the different appraisal patterns being employed in the selected movie to represent particular phenomena positively or negatively?

## **Significance of the Study**

The education about environmental and commercial aspects of the films having environmental themes is gaining popularity with each passing decade. Certain features of nature and life are embellished in these films. Animated films were meant for the kids initially but now people of almost every age-group likes to watch animated movies. Awareness is something that will always be fruitful in any field of life. Most of the film-viewers nowadays seem to think that together with the entertainment, they get knowledge about the world by watching these films. But the movie often have underlying ideologies that a layman fails to detect. This study has tried to bring the possible facts in to light that has shown how the movie try to influence the thought process of the viewers about events, ideas and things. Furthermore, many of the viewers may not want the movie to tame the perception of their children in a way that they think is wrong. Certain aspects of environment are portrayed as positive and others as negative in the movie. The movie is always inspiring for a countless number of people around the world. However, the views and opinions of creators conveyed through the movie is not always as plain as they seem on the surface. Sometimes, there are underlying ideas that need to be understood by the audience and then they should form their own opinion about something that is shown in the movie. This study intends to help them in this regard. The findings of the present research will not just uncover the underlying meanings of the ecological terms used in the movie but it will also make the ideas of the movie easy to comprehend for the audience.

## **Literature Review**

Ecolinguistics examines the complex interplay between language and the ecological systems in which it operates. As its name suggests, the field integrates linguistics with the study of ecological relationships, exploring how discourses shape—and are shaped by—human interactions with the more-than-human world (Haugen, 1972; Derni, 2008). Over the past three decades, ecolinguistics has evolved into a distinct interdisciplinary domain (LeVasseur, 2014; Stibbe, 2015; Chen, 2016; Wenjuan, 2017; Fill, 2018), moving beyond earlier descriptive approaches to critically assess whether particular linguistic patterns and underlying “stories we live by” promote life-sustaining relationships or, conversely, contribute to ecological degradation (Stibbe, 2015). Rather than privileging either language or ecology, contemporary ecolinguistics investigates their reciprocal influence, analysing how representations of nature, animals, and environmental processes in discourse influence attitudes, behaviours, and sustainability outcomes (Zhao, 2019). This dual focus distinguishes

the field and equips it to address pressing questions of ecological justice in an era of environmental crisis.

Ivchenko (2021) shows that discourse of comic animation films like 'Zootopia' educate people belonging to all age groups about significance of life and covers all types of life, that is, human life as well as plant and animal life. This discourse enlightens about value of nature, value of social life, value of biodiversity and diversity in general. She points out that ecology in comics works in this type discourse along with verbal and non-verbal forms, in broader sense, give writers the chance to openly convey their perception and opinion on variety of issues like racialism, environmental problems and discrimination. Moreover, they provide the audience with tranquility, entertainment and encourages think more positively about the domain of animated comic ecodiscourse, divert one's attention towards significant issues and realities, keep a logical and cultured understanding visual, audial and verbal data. Ecological comic functions, through the lens of this discourse of animation depict the issues being faced in the real world around us, and assist the audience to handle them and find any solutions that are possible. Besides, this discourse helps to prevent from baneful and damaging approaches, perspectives and notions by encouraging eco-friendly relation between man and nature. The language is described by ecological comic functions to motivate, keep and inspire the good relation and attitude towards ecology. The other goal is to ring an alarm about the destruction or demoralization of the good relation with ecology, the attitude and role towards anti-ecology notions by means of language.

Ain, Ahmed, & Nawaz (2021) study a number of food production companies in reference to their advertisements to conduct an ecolinguistic analysis. The study, after analysis, shows that those companies employ different linguistic means in very foxy manner to make the readers think that they are just trying to sell their product though their advertisement but instill certain narratives in their minds without their notice. The narratives seem very plain on the surface but with the help of linguistic means, every narrative hides a doctrine of consumerism. These linguistic means accomplish an important task building the narratives and convincing the readers to accept those narratives. The notions that these narratives infuse in the minds of the public not just target the introduction of a certain product but also tame the thinking process of their target public. These advertisements somehow try to guide people as to how they should think about the facts and everything around them. Some of the linguistic strategies they use show that these ads introduce a thing in a very distinctive and queer way. Some things and ideas are magnified by creators and presenters of these ads and they try to attract more and more attention of the masses. They try to give prominence to certain features of the things they promote. They use hollow slogans to paint their products as healthy as well as eco-friendly.

Miless, Azzouzi, Hdi, & Handoko (2021) study discourse related to documentaries based on ecological background. The researched is focused on the documentary "Whining of the Blue Lagoon: الزرقاء انين المرجة" that has natural and environmental connections. The whole plot of the documentary is analyzed using the measures of threat and fear. Following the aforementioned method, the study puts the spotlight on ecological discourse. The visuals and sound effects in the documentary add weight to the arguments of the creators but they are ignored the study to focus purely on environmental elements. The contributors and the tales told in the documentary used some certain systems. This study shows that things told by common people are not

just their own words but the creators have much to do with whatever those people said in the documentary. This clearly shows that there are certain ever-present inner workings of brain or ideologies in the creation of documentaries related to ecology in Morocco. The stories told by common people in documentaries are nothing strange on the surface but it should be studied from all dimensions to explain what is true and what is made-up.

Sania (2020) finds that that struggle of power, conflict and exercise of force are magnified in superhero movies. Devastation is predestined in the movie. Nature and general public are somehow treated as insignificant. All of which leads the audience to consider barbarity and power as positive phenomena. The attraction and influence of the movie is exploited to exercise salience and erasure. Violence is depicted as heroic and non-violent are shown as weaker individuals. Possession of weapons and rebellion against the authorities are depicted as desirable qualities to become a hero and democracy is devalued. Democratic behaviors are discouraged by showing them as an obstruction in providing justice to the oppressed ones. In this way the viewers are directed to be on the side of the mighty ones who are shown as brave and virtuous. But these mighty and heroic figures just pretend that they care about the destruction and excessive use of power.

Akhiyat (2021) writes how the movie Moana represents the ill treatment and rehabilitation of natural environment. The abuse of nature does not only affect the island of Moana but also other islands around it. Moana is trying to create harmony between people and nature because she prefers the survival of natural environment. She and Maui are part of the mission to restore the balance in environment. The mother-nature Te Fiti possesses the power of creation but she has been deprived of her powers. The natural environment starts to crumble into chaos as soon as Te Fiti loses her powers. However, after a long wait of a thousand years, a girl called Moana girds up her loin to search Maui and finally restore the powers of Te Fiti by placing the heart at the required place. Ironically, both heroic figures have to face the evil representation of Te Fiti called Te Ka. Moana is successful in placing the stone in the right place and this suggests that nature has been saved by creating the long-lost balance after all the islands get their natural forms back.

Malik (2019) studies the use of erasure in a TV show about wildlife named as 'Meateater'. According to her, animals are deprived of their original identity when they are represented as humans. The animals when presented as humans do not even look like the same individuals that live in those natural environments of theirs. This creates false notion that animals are of less importance in the nature and humans are the center of everything that happens around. Animals are taken out of their natural environment and depicted as human puppets being used for the sake of entertainment industry. This leads to wrong path of following harmful human behaviors towards nature because these animals are presented merely as humans with animal costumes. The pronouns used for the animals give them human genders like they are a human society. The biologically strong animals are given male gender and weak animals are given female gender by the narrator. The other vocabulary used as verbs and adjectives for the animals also renders them human identity instead of animal. The host also uses demeaning and sexual language for animals in some instances. Humans are demonstrated as culturally superior to animals that are repressed. The social aspect is also misleading because social life of animals is purely based on the struggle of power and survival of the fittest.

Abd El-Hameed (2015) examines cartoons printed in Egyptian newspapers to evolve the methods of teaching foreign languages. All of the cartoons are taken from two newspapers and are criticizing different aspects of society in Egypt. Both images and language are used to aware the public of national issues in a funny way. El-Hameed's study tries to show that cartoons can be a good tool to put light on ecology related issues in Egypt. The language used in these cartoons sometimes contains two contradictory ideas and sometimes one idea in the language and other idea in the images. At times it is also hard to make sense of these cartoons owing to their paradoxical nature within the content. The language of these cartoons depicts the behaviors, individualities, narratives and social surroundings of the people.

Farooq & Umar (2021) express that society is formed and erected through the important tool of language but flaws in language can result into undesirable outcome. A major flaw is removal of human agent from the texts relating to science of environmental issues. A big gap is generated by doing this and the message of awareness of protection of environment remains incomplete and less effective. Almost all the textbooks included this study are found lacking this element in their content. Verbs or adjectives that replace nouns and passive voice sentences are used excessively to avoid the use of nouns in these texts. This leads to a situation where readers do not get enough understanding of their role in the debate of environment. Therefore, it is need of the hour to increase the use of human agent in the environmental science textbooks and overuse of passive voice sentences and use of verbs and adjectives in place of nouns should also be reduced sufficiently. To create awareness among people of their own role in the protection of natural surroundings, human agent should be used extensively in these texts.

Istianah & Suhandano (2022) uncover the language used in website of Kalimantan tourism. The script of this website is filled with both types of evaluation of physical surroundings. A part of the island named Borneo in Indonesia is called Kalimantan. Kalimantan is full of natural scenery including attractive land and underwater environments. Descendents of Chinese people and culture of Dayak population are mostly found in this island. The website uses flowery and favorable words to tempt the people from around the world for visiting this are of the Borneo. The language used on the website tries to give the impression to the readers that they will feel fulfilled and rejoiced by visiting Kalimantan. The interface of the website is designed in a way that should obtain favorable responses and compels the reader to think about whether he should give the idea of touring this place a go. From the pictures and mention of vast forests to endangered animals, the whole website is designed by keeping in mind that readers should be lured into thinking about this place as much as it is possible as it happens in consumerism.

Zhang Ruijie and Wei He (2021) analyze language and ecology employing the philosophy of ecosophy in the schools of philosophy of China. They evaluate the relation between people and place. Several principles are studied comprehend the nature of connection between people and their place. The study also analyzes the concept of place and sense of place in a peculiar way. Both eastern wisdom in philosophy and highly valued concepts of western thought are used in connection with ecology to create an understanding of link between people and place. The researchers have analyzed semiotic means for the purpose of pointing out and evaluating their impacts on ecology. They try to make sense two major aspects by comparing them with one another. The first notion is ecology and its relation to mental approach of

human brain and human behavior. The second notion is system of semiotics and its implications on mindset and actions of humans. The ecosophy discussed in this paper can be used in many other areas relating to language, ecology and specifically ecolinguistics that possess natural similarities with it.

Hameed (2021) applies framing theory of Stibbe (2012) on animals mentioned in The Holy Quran. She analyzes the names of animals present in the Divine text with reference to ecology. Content analysis method is used select words from the Holy Book. The researcher points out how animals are used as frames and subframes in different parts of the Book. Before doing ecological analysis, only those frames were selected which have least amount of ambiguity. These animals are depicted as living beings, attractive assets, possible helpers and heavenly manifestations by using framing. These framed animals are understood to have the qualities of the beings who can keep environmental balance of the surroundings and are created purposefully. Their value as a significant feature of the ecology is doubtlessly portrayed through the use of numerous frames in the text of the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran is book addressed to humans but it does not downplay the value of non-human creatures by framing them as invaluable for the sustainability of environment.

Norton & Hulme (2019) have selected four momentous editorial news stories about climate from the national newspapers of The United Kingdom. These stories have played a very impactful role on the issue of climate change throughout the country. Multidimensional ecolinguistic framework is used to describe these climate change newspaper stories. All of these four news stories have different approach towards climate change and also offer different solutions to this problem. Norton and Hulme also show some aspects of these stories where consensus is found as to the solution of climate change.

Naz & Hassan (2022) touch on the speeches of Greta Thunberg to conduct their ecolinguistic analysis. They show how Greta Thunberg uses linguistics tools to promote her ideology of environmental activism. Greta uses the framing technique by replacing mildly effective words with more effective words to enhance the importance of climate change issue. Greta Thunberg uses both optimistic and pessimistic tone and vocabulary in her speeches to achieve her purpose. She exploits the metaphors that evoke uncertainty. The use of these metaphors is also explained by Stibbe (2015) as the framing theory. Use of simple, direct and popular narratives against political class is also dominant in her speeches. Using the ecologically beneficial terms, she enhances the effect of her talks. One of the reasons of her rapidly growing popularity is that she uses aggressive words instead of the polite and lid ones in her speeches.

Poole & Spangler (2020) also use the ecolinguistic theory by Stibbe (2015) study language and ecology in popular video game 'Animal Crossing: New Leaf 2012'. They focused on the philosophy of ecosophy that preaches equilibrium in nature. They identify the stories in the game that normalize the typified relationship among humans, animals and surroundings because of power and dominion. They criticize the game for the normalization of consumption, labor and debt. Although they appreciate the relationship developed between humans and their environment to co-exist. Conceptualization of the world in these games have a significant impact on the players. These simulations have the ability to manipulate people's basic beliefs and behaviors. These games also develop a capitalistic economic approach in gamers. Regardless of the type of character a gamer chooses to play, he has to achieve similar goals every time and success is determined through the actions taken in accordance



with preferences of game developers. Considering the game world as the real world, players think that they are freely making their choices but all of their choices are driven by some parameters set by the game. On the surface, the game seems to encourage eco-friendly behaviors but the actual in-game content does not help much in achieving this goal.

Zhdanava, Kaur, & Rajandran (2021) have conducted a study on a popular vegan campaign in UK. They have used twenty posters from the campaign to analyze the use of non-human animal characters in those posters as part of their ecolinguistic research. The merger, of images and language, creates the ‘stories’ proposed by Stibbe (2015). Non-human animals are depicted both as active and passive in these posters. This study discusses the ideology, conviction and salience but also throws some light on erasure in these campaign posters. This campaign is more about non-human animals being displayed on the posters and less about the animal rights in general. People are encouraged to treat these non-human animals as equals be considerate towards their lives and sentiments. So, in a way it counters the ideas people come across in the advertisements about food and other animal or plant related products. These researchers try to help in teaching the methods to create narratives for animals. They think that these non-human animals are living beings like their human counterparts, thus, deserve the right to live their lives as the humans do. As a consequence, it will help in creating good relation between humans and animals for the benefit of ecosystem.

All of the researchers mentioned above have unveiled different ecolinguistic aspects, of several types of texts, employing different theoretical and analytical frameworks. Some of them have studied films, TV shows and documentaries to explore the language related to ecology and its role in a certain movie or documentary. Some have focused their research on the ecological features of the language used in newspapers, websites, educational textbooks, advertisements, speeches and religious texts. Some of them have also conducted research on animated movies but the movies used in the present research have not undergone ecolinguistic examination before. Furthermore, there are also studies available that have used the Arran Stibbe (2015) model of ecolinguistic research but they have neither employed the ‘evaluation’ aspect of this model in their research on almost anything nor have they previously applied the ‘salience’ narrative on the movies selected for the present research. This study has not only ensured the selection of the latest sample but also presents the latest possible literature related to the research as reference.

### **Research Methodology**

The study follows a predominantly qualitative design with a minor quantitative component. Data comprise the full official transcripts of Disney’s *The Lion King* (1994 original and 2019 live-action versions where relevant), collected from reliable online sources and cross-verified against the films. Purposive sampling was employed to select this text because of its globally influential environmental narrative and its rich ecolinguistic content. Analysis proceeds through Stibbe’s (2015) Ecolinguistic Discourse Analysis model: linguistic and semiotic elements (dialogue, lyrics, characterisation, and visual-verbal interplay) are systematically examined for patterns of salience and evaluation. Quantitative supplementation consists of frequency counts of ecologically significant lexical items to support claims of prominence or erasure. Findings are interpreted in relation to the beneficial or destructive impact of the film’s

underlying “stories we live by” on audience perceptions of ecological interdependence and human–nonhuman relations.

### **Theoretical and Analytical Framework**

This study adopts Arran Stibbe’s (2015) Ecolinguistics as its theoretical and analytical framework, focusing specifically on two of the eight cognitive areas he identifies: salience and evaluation (appraisal). Salience examines which elements of the more-than-human world are foregrounded or backgrounded in the discourse, while evaluation/appraisal reveals the positive or negative judgments attached to ecological entities, relationships, and processes. Together, these tools enable the researcher to determine whether the stories-to-live-by embedded in Disney’s *The Lion King* promote life-sustaining relationships or, conversely, reinforce destructive ideologies such as anthropocentric hierarchy and the naturalisation of dominance. Although Stibbe’s model includes other areas (erasure, metaphor, framing, ideology, identity, conviction), the present investigation deliberately centres on salience and evaluation, concepts that remain underexplored in existing ecolinguistic analyses of animated film.

### **Analysis**

The quantitative analysis of ecologically significant lexical items in the film’s transcript reveals a total of 74 instances, overwhelmingly dominated by nominal forms. Nouns (N) constitute the largest category with 43 occurrences (58.1%), followed by noun phrases (NP) with 16 instances (21.6%). Together, nominal elements account for nearly 80% of all ecologically marked items, confirming a strong pattern of salience through nominalisation and reification of the more-than-human world. Examples of highly salient nouns include “sun,” “grass,” “antelope,” “water,” “stars,” “mud,” “bones,” “fireflies,” “pride lands,” and “circle of life,” which repeatedly position nature as a tangible, named, and central entity rather than a mere backdrop.

Verbs directly linked to ecological processes or destruction are far less frequent, appearing only 6 times (8.1%), e.g., “protect,” “eat,” “overhunting,” “killing,” “decimate,” and “stay downwind.” Similarly, adjectives carrying evaluative ecological weight (also 6 instances, 8.1%) are sparse but powerful when present: “rotting,” “oozing,” “burning,” “slimy,” “chewy,” and “local” predominantly evoke decay, disgust, or commodification, especially in scenes depicting the hyenas’ barren territory. Prepositional phrases (PP) and adverbial phrases (AdvP) are marginal (2 and 1 instances respectively), reinforcing that the film grants salience primarily through naming and objectification rather than dynamic processes or relational positioning.

This heavy reliance on nouns and noun phrases (79.7% combined) foregrounds ecological entities as fixed, almost monumental elements within the “Circle of Life” narrative, thereby magnifying their ideological importance while simultaneously naturalising hierarchical relations (e.g., lions as “kings,” antelope as “prey”). The relative scarcity of verbs and evaluative adjectives, by contrast, backgrounds active processes of destruction or ethical judgment, subtly erasing human-like agency from most non-lion animals and downplaying the destructive consequences of imbalance until the dramatic final act. Thus, the lexical distribution itself constitutes a key ecolinguistic mechanism that both celebrates and constrains the stories audiences live by regarding the more-than-human world.

**Traces of Saliency in the Movie *The Lion King***

“From the day we arrive on this planet and, blinking, step into the sun there’s more to see than can ever be seen, more to do than can ever be done.”

The *Lion King* starts with a song that almost describes the whole theme of the film. In this quote the singer tells the audience about the earth that from the time of our birth this planet starts to mesmerize us with its never-ending diversity. Singer tries to focus on the exploration of the earth at the start of her song. We are being told that we come in this world having a blank mind but our surroundings start to teach us from the very first minute. We have too much to see and comprehend even at very initial stages. No one had the idea that they would be able to observe this much around them after their arrival on this planet. The singer describes it as a big enigma for us and we can find something new every day here. We explore more and more as we spend more time on here. As the time progresses, we start to interact with our surroundings. We learn that we can and we have to perform many tasks that we were probably destined to perform to be a part of this whole system of existence. Everyone on this planet has their work cut out here. No creature is purposeless and things to do on this earth have no limits. All living things are busy in performing their tasks from dawn to dusk and singer stresses on this idea of beautiful world that is busy all the time. The hustle and bustle of the jungle is shown along with the lyrics of the songs to convince the audience that there is much to explore and everyone is busy in the jungle that can be a symbol for the world if seen on a larger scale. The nature and humans have always had an indispensable connection that works both ways (Cahyadi, C. P. 2022).

“There’s too much to take in here, more to find than can ever be found, through the sapphire sky keeps great and small on the endless round. It’s the circle of life.”

The song keeps shedding light on the story we’re going to experience ahead in the film. The singer sings about the creatures of jungle that are going about their daily business. Their tiring work never ends. These creatures are of many kinds and belong to different species. Their daily routine is a never-ending cycle. They spend every day doing something for themselves and their dependents and repeats the same the next day and the day after and the after that and this routine goes on without fail. This daily routine is termed as circle of life. This circle is not just confined to their daily routines but it encompasses their lives and lives of the ancestors as well as their heirs who will follow in their footsteps. So, the jungle is a world that keeps repeating these patterns again and again in days, seasons and life times of these creatures.

The other important aspect of this circle is that everyone and everything in this world depicted as jungle is dependent and reliant on each other. As it happens in food chain, everyone benefits from everyone else. If the food chain is intact, life goes on in its desired fashion but when this food chain is disturbed because of any anomaly, the whole structure shows cracks caused by it. Normality is not always ideal but it keeps life and lives in the required balance and keeps the chaos at bay. Change is not always desirable as it removes some to add some. Even in the world of man, the changes brought about over the centuries have not always resulted in betterment but have worsened the living conditions and many parts of this planet. The normalcy is shown as an invaluable phenomenon here that guarantees the smooth running of life and everything and everyone attached to it.

Animals love their habitat same as humans love their homes and hometowns. Shelter plays a vital role in lives of creatures dwelling on this planet. As home is one of the nicest things that nature provides the animals for shelter, nature becomes important in

providing resources to tackle the challenges presented by the same nature. The name of the jungle area under the control of Mufasa is named as Pride Lands which is also symbolic. Everyone who lives in any certain country, state or town in the world has a feeling of superiority about that place. The affinity that connects the creatures to their surroundings is termed in many ways. In case of humans, it is called as patriotism. This feature of human nature is also present in other species dwelling on this planet. The same is depicted in this film by naming the area of the land as Pride Lands. In other words, it can be described as a place of which the dwellers of proud and possess a sense of superiority over other places. Mufasa family clearly considers the place as their homeland and show attachment to it on several occasions that is when Mufasa tells Zazu that its home for Scar who is alienated but is still considered part of this family and the land. Same is the case with name, Pride Rock, given to the house or perhaps a cave behind a ledge in which Mufasa and his family resides.

“He slammed his head into the trees and our beaks aren’t built for it.”

It was Charles Darwin who compelled people to think about how fittest ones can survive and evolve according to the needs and demands of their surroundings. Nature has in some ways designed certain roles for the certain species of creature. How can anyone deny the importance of the phrase: right person for the right job. Whenever a person or any organization tries to accomplish a task and do something of significance, the most important thing is to find the person who is best suited and who has expertise for that certain job. This the lesson being taught through the words uttered by Zazu when he tells us about his cousin who was of the same species as Zazu but considered himself a woodpecker without having the biological requirements to be a woodpecker. So, he always tried to use his sensitive beak to drill the trees but never succeeded. Instead, he was concussed often because of his foolishness. This anecdote is also used to downplay the need for try, try again. A person who is determined to do a thing might be chasing a wild goose which is not fruitful. It was certainly not the right choice in the case of Zazu’s cousin who didn’t realize that he was not meant to be woodpecker and paid the price for that in form of the head injuries he faced as a result.

“Before the sunrise, he’s your son.”

Biological relations among the organisms, is part of the design that nature uses to smoothly function. Parents are a wonderful and strange blessing of nature and the enigma of their relation and feeling for their children is even more intriguing. This is also true in the case of Simba whose parents love him but still shown as normal parents that are found in human societies. Both wants to rear the child in best possible manner but responsibilities, of either one, are somehow different in manner and nature. As in the case of many humans, Simba’s father is responsible for outdoor and day life and mother holds more responsibility when he is at him and during the night, he needs to be taken care of as a kid. This may not be the case in many societies now but Mufasa family, perhaps, holds the conservative traditions of the past. So, this longstanding social aspect of human societies is also brought to light through these words uttered by Mufasa when he tells Sarabi to not disturb him before daylight show up and tells her that it her responsibility to tend him during his bedtime. Interestingly, changing cycles of day and night are affecting the social relations of the creatures. Woman and nature both are traditionally victimized and exploited by man and environmental-themed movies show the same in some form (Hegarsari, D. 2017).

“Everything you see exists together in a delicate balance. As a king, you need to

understand that balance and respect all the creatures.”

Earth's environment can be described by some key words and one them is, balance. Mufasa tries to teach Simba the same principles that he and his ancestors followed to keep things in certain way. That certain way is to consider every single part of this smoothly running machine as important the other parts. No single creature whether big or small is useless and less important in the grand scheme of things. Everyone and everything in the environment add up to the balance of the nature. It is believed by some historians that one of the reasons behind the bubonic plague named as the Black Death, that took millions of lives in fourteenth century, was decreased number of cats that resulted into increase in the number of rats spreading the disease. The balance between the predator and the prey is the most important feature of the nature. When this balance is disturbed even slightly, it causes problems that take years or even centuries to fix and some are not fixed ever. Mufasa is teaching the same to Simba by telling him that all creatures and their co-dependent needs must be respected. He also teaches him not to hunt more than his needs and it'll keep everything around in good shape.

“When we die, our bodies become the grass, and antelope eat the grass, and so, we are all connected in the great circle of life.”

There cannot be a better description of the food chain and dependency of one element of nature on the other. Mufasa tells Simba how everything in the nature is important for the survival of the lions than just the food and water they use. Their apparent diet is the animals like antelopes that seemingly bear no connection with the lions themselves. But Mufasa tells how antelopes get their food that is grass that is the result if the fertility of the soil derived from the dead bodies of many species of animals including lions. So, antelopes depend on lions for their food as lions depend on them. This circle of life is what Simba has to understand and protect. On the other hand, whoever does not understand this principle, is depicted as villain like Scar and hyenas. Natural environments can flourish well in their own unique way if they are left unchanged and untouched by those can disturb this natural cycle (Alfiah & Gultom, 2020).

“The great Kings of the Past look down on us from those stars.”

Stars are heavenly bodies that illuminate the earth's atmosphere during night. But here is another piece of wisdom imparted by a father to his son. Historically, man has attached stars to many other phenomena owing to their overwhelming light they emit in the darkness of the night and the scene they create which changes the experience in the dark atmosphere around at night. Some even consider stars as guides to the future of any being. In some civilizations, stars were thought to be the ancestors who had died and turned into stars in the sky in their next life. Same belief is revealed here in this story as Mufasa tells Simba that stars are in fact the previous kings of their dynasty who became stars after fulfilling their purpose on earth and dying. Thus, a simple phenomenon of nature is turned into a spiritual belief as happened often in human societies throughout the course of history. This movie provides all the character-building blocks for a person (Lolang, Rais, Oualeng, & Prayitno, 2023).

“No little cub could survive that fall.”

Biological features of many creatures in the environment can enable or prevent them from certain things. These features make them weak, strong, ugly, ugly beautiful and so on. One of these features is the age of these creatures. Lions are one of those species that are affected massively by age. Like humans, they are at their peak

strength and ability in their youth and middle age but these qualities start to decline as they get older. Similarly, kids are also physically weak and are more prone to harm than adults. However, one interesting difference between kids and old timers is appearance. Lion cubs like human babies and many other species in their earliest years are cuter as compared to the age when they are living the last few years, months or days of their lives according to their life span. In this dialogue, Kamari points out to the same reality that creatures have less endurance to survive during trouble in the early years of their biological age as is the case with Simba here in this scene who could not have survived falling from that high ground if he were not lucky enough. But surviving would not be that difficult if there were an older bigger, smarter and stronger lion than just a cub.

“He’s decimated the Pride Lands. There’s no food no water.”

This story perhaps goes too far to prove that when balance is disrupted in the nature, things go south. For instance, the change of command in the jungle from one lion to another lion causes the ruin. Even hyenas that are part of the same ecosystem are shown as a threat to that system. One reason behind this is perhaps the historical connotations that are associated with hyenas in human societies. They were almost always considered an evil and villainous animal species in folklore of many historical civilizations. Somehow, same negative image of hyenas is used here to explain that when the wicked ones disturb the balance of nature for their greed or personal benefit, chaos is the result. Nala says that their beloved jungle is ruined as a result of the overhunting done by hyenas and Scar. It could have been prevented if Mufasa or Simba had been in the power the practice the principle of hunting according needs only. This is still a queer way to describe the significance of balance in nature because lions and other animals are not normally the cause of this imbalance but the script was required to show how important circle of life is and what happens when things do not fall in with the normality we call as balance of nature.

“My father once told me to protect everything the light touches. If I don’t fight for it, who will?”

This utterance by Simba unambiguously states the direction the films want its audience to follow. A character that is portrayed as a hero in the story is used to say something that is perhaps the ultimate message of the film. An anthropomorphic animal society is used to show that there are some who intend to save the environment and there are others who don’t care or even harm it intentionally for their personal gain. This is very symbolic of the world humans live in today. Safety of natural surroundings is a big debate in this age. Majority of population is still ignorant perhaps owing to their attention divided by many other issues that they consider more urgent than spending time to save the nature but there is growing number of people who are worried or even obsessed with the safety of wilderness. The film is trying to appeal to those audiences by making a case for environmental protection and everything that is part of this natural environment.

### **Traces of Evaluation in the movie *The Lion King***

“Through the sapphire sky keeps great and small on the endless round. It’s the circle of life”.

Struggle for survival is an inevitable aspect of nature. Earth’s environment demands struggle and wilderness goes even one step further by placing more challenges for survival for the organisms existing in it. People often term their country, city or town

as jungle when they want to point out the lawlessness and savagery in that place. Jungle is associated with animalistic behavior and violence. People keep struggling to accomplish the goals in their lives. This struggle is not easy for most of them. Hardships, although, are part of their lives but no wants them and no one desires to be their life being difficult. Same is the case with the animals living in jungle they keep struggling for their survival and are in some sort of battle to stay alive, fill their bellies and raise their young ones. This struggle is shown as thing to be admired and desired in these lyrics. These animals are depicted as the employees of an organization that makes them work hard for their livelihood but they are still to be envied because they are employed in doing something instead of being unemployed and useless. It can be said that their toil in the jungle is embellished and dignified as something admirable.

“While some are born to feast, others spend their lives in dark, begging for scraps.”

A cruel aspect of nature is that it does not, apparently, try to justify the living conditions for everyone. Might is right is also true in the case of animals living in the jungles. Power and good fortune helps the some of them to enjoy the lives with everything they need at their disposal and the unlucky ones face the living conditions in which they can barely survive. For instance, how many marine creatures would survive and flourish if a river starts to dry up, but it might not be bad for some reptiles that are better suited to dry and hot weather. A lion lives fearlessly in a grassland but a deer's heart keeps thumping whenever it hears any unusual sound in tall grass. Life seems unfair to some and too fair for others. This dialogue by Scar points out to the harsh realities of nature and the principle by which environment operates.

“And beyond those shadows? You must not go there Simba.”

Darkness is natural phenomenon and is caused when lights are out or sun sets after the day is over. Night is something that cannot be imagined without darkness that comes with it too. Darkness, however, limits or diminishes the ability to see things around. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons that humans have always been on bad terms with the phenomenon of nature. Darkness is used to portray something adverse or evil in the film as it has been done traditionally in film and literature and this movie is no different. The writer of the film wants to associate a place with evil and negativity and finds no better thing to help his cause than darkness because the word ‘shadows’ immediately implies in the minds of audiences that something inhospitable is present at the place named as shadows.

“The birds are tweeting at four in the morning.”

The aural aspect of the surroundings is as important as visual aspect. Nature's beauty appeals to man's aesthetics in many forms. Human faculties include many powers and hearing is no less important among those. If random sounds termed as noise irritates people, the sound patterns in a rhythm will let them feel the internal bliss. Zazu is reporting about the birds that are chirping early in the morning and Zazu is probably annoyed by them but for the audience of the film is a blissful thing to know about because cinema goers are mostly living in the urban areas and are deprived of the chirping of birds. This dialogue excites the audiences about the sounds in nature they are going to hear later in the movie. Interestingly, in the context of the film, these tweeting sounds are described as an offense or an annoying activity that falls into the area of negative evaluation. Zazu is surely not a fan of those sounds too early in the morning. The Lion King is a movie that is a good source of education on environmental protection (Lolang, Rais, Oualeng, & Prayitno, 2023).

“All those rotting bones and burning pools of oozing mud”

Natural elements like fire or heat are necessary elements for survival of living beings on this planet. Decaying is also helpful in disposing of and recycling the dead flora and fauna to keep the surroundings clean and keep the circle of life running smoothly. But these elements are used negatively here to describe the evil place beyond the shadows. Scar is trying to raise the curiosity of Simba by describing the elephant graveyard as an exotic place where Simba has never been before but ultimately the words uttered by him are giving the notion of something evil cooking there. The writer has used these words as a warning to audience that their beloved and cute hero should avoid visiting the place where might have hatched a conspiracy against the Mufasa family. Not only phrases like burning pools and rotting bones are used to describe the troubled place by oozing mud is also a phrase that creates negative feelings for the place in the minds of the viewers.

“I heard about this place, Nala. The most incredible, amazing... An elephant graveyard.”

Like many other features of our environment, exotic places have their unique attraction. Here in this quote, a generally dislikable place, like graveyard, is curiously described by Simba to Nala as if it were some distant place in a fairy-tale. Simba describes it as a place that must be visited at least once in a lifetime. These words add to the exotic value of the place. Its enchanting quality also affects the audiences who are thrilled and eager to know more about this location in jungle. Writer has skillfully employed the sense of curiosity to turn an undesirable place into a place which is positively embellished for audiences as is the case with Simba who is planning for his adventure of visiting this graveyard.

“Hyenas and lions have been at war since the beginning of time.”

Wars and conflicts are generally associated with humans not animals but this sentence uttered by Shenzi, a hyena, points out that longstanding conflicts are not limited to human race. Writer depicts negativity in the relations between two prominent species of jungle. Although both are predators and carnivores, but this harmony of qualities is not enough for them to live together in peace. Even in real life jungles, hyenas are scared of lions and lions hate them because they try to steal the hard-earned prey-meat from lions. Same is shown in this film that hyenas want the best hunting grounds of jungle but lions in a certain way own those grounds as their territories. This has led to a conflict between the two species which spans over the centuries.

“You fools have stripped the land of every living thing.”

When the film starts the creators clearly convey the message about what they are going to demonstrate in rest of the film. That particular message was circle of life of which every creature in jungle is an integral component. But wait! Are they really going to stick to their belief throughout the movie? Turns out they are going make exceptions for some creatures. This interesting situation develops, when hyenas are described to be responsible for the imbalance in a certain part of the jungle. Scar blames them of killing every creature in their part of the jungle turning it into a dark, hellish and barren place. Writer gives these hyenas a villainous look and associates all the negativity in the story with them. Hyenas are humiliated again and again by means of different dialogues that is when Scars tells us that a hyena's belly is never full. If human side of this issue of balance in environmental is investigated, it becomes clear that even the movies produced in the name of the nature have costed the environment dearly (Murray, & Heumann, 2019).

“Mufasa has always shown too much restrain when it comes to hunting.”



On one hand hyenas are portrayed as symbol of all the negativity for their hunting or what may be called as overhunting and on the other hand, Mufasa and his family of lions are praised for the same hunting by showing their hunting as controlled hunting. Not only lions are described as heroes in this matter but hunting is also described as a positive activity unlike the hunting by hyenas. This is strange from one standpoint but justified from another standpoint which relates to the use of the word restrain.

“Risky everything. Fought off angry vultures.”

Another scene and another creature depicted negatively. This time it is the vultures. Poor vultures are also victims of the evil historical descriptions in literature and this film follows the same path. This quote by Timon not only shows the bravery of Pumbaa and Timon but also the demonic role of vultures that nearly ate the supposed hero of the film. What better proof one needs of the role of a character in a story when that character is trying to kill the hero of that story. Vultures were not even among the prominent group of animals who supported the royal family of Pride Rock. All these indications are still inferior to the one that vultures are traditionally pictured as evil and same is the case in this movie.

“When the world turns its back on you... you turn our back on the world.”

Timon tries to instill these negative thoughts into Simba’s mind. The world around us is the basic subject of ecology. World itself is not harmful to anyone if one thinks subjectively about this matter. It is the people around us who turn the world into friendly or hostile place. In this quote by Timon, the world that surrounds us is described as a bad place where selfishness is a norm and one has to be selfish to survive in it. This is a negative evaluation of our surroundings by writer that will lead the audience to think that safety from troubles depends on how selfish one can be in dealing different situations. The more selfish a person is, the safer he will be in this world.

“No, it’s no circle, it’s a line.”

At one point in the film, the negativity gets to the extent that Timon declares the idea of circle of life as a false and misleading belief. The idea that states that everyone and everything in our environment is connected to each other to ensure the successful functioning of the whole ecosystem. But this notion is denounced by writer Timon, when Timon tries to convince Simba that Mufasa was wrong in believing that it is a circle of life, rather it is a line of life. What he means here by the phrase line of life is that only fittest will survive and that survival is only possible one acts subjectively and adopts a self-centered approach instead of thinking about everyone else around him which was the lesson taught by Mufasa to Simba earlier in the movie. Timon proves this argument when he advises Simba to fend for himself because his line does not have consequences for anyone else’s line. The term line here is used for life of person that closely connected to the lives of others according to Mufasa but in Timon’s view, one’s life does not have anything to do with the lives of others in many ways. This movie tries to harness the power of different types by using animals (Cerniglia, & Lynch, 2011).

### **Discussion**

The analysis of *The Lion King* (1994/2019) reveals a heavy reliance on nouns and noun phrases (e.g., “pride lands,” “circle of life,” “sun,” “grass,” “antelope,” “stars,” “water,” “shadows”) that foreground ecological entities and establish nature as a central, tangible presence. Salience is strategically deployed: pleasant elements such

as sunrise, vast green lands, and the harmonious “circle of life” are magnified, whereas the brutal aspects—predation, barren lands, oozing mud, and rotting bones—are selectively overstated in Scar’s territory or backgrounded elsewhere. Evaluation patterns are sharply polarised: royal lions, light, and balanced ecosystems receive strongly positive appraisal as noble and life-sustaining, while hyenas, vultures, darkness, and imbalance are negatively judged as villains that disrupt the natural order. This dual mechanism simultaneously celebrates ecological interdependence and naturalizes hierarchical dominance and violence.

These results align with and extend ecolinguistic studies of environmental narratives in animation. The film promotes a beneficial story of the “circle of life” and balance (cf. Akhiyat, 2021, on *Moana*), yet exploits natural beauty for aesthetic and commercial appeal while erasing broader human ecological responsibility. Violence and power—embodied in the lion king’s rule and the raw strength of predators—are portrayed positively rather than critiqued (cf. Sana, 2020), and human agents of destruction are entirely absent, with conflict displaced onto animal villains (cf. Farooq & Umar, 2021). Through selective salience and appraisal, *The Lion King* thus reinforces both life-sustaining ideals of harmony and destructive ideologies of anthropocentric hierarchy and “might is right,” shaping audience perceptions of the more-than-human world in deeply ambivalent ways.

### **Conclusion**

This ecolinguistic investigation, titled ‘Wild through Words’, demonstrates that Disney’s *The Lion King* constructs its powerful environmental narrative predominantly through strategic patterns of salience and appraisal. The film’s lexical choices—dominated by nouns and noun phrases such as “circle of life,” “pride lands,” “sun,” “grass,” “stars,” “shadows,” and “antelope”—foreground nature as a tangible, almost monumental entity, granting it undeniable discursive prominence. Salience is further intensified by magnifying aesthetically pleasing elements (sunrise, green expanses, harmonious animal communities) while selectively overstating or backgrounding the brutal aspects of the ecosystem (predation, barren lands, oozing mud). Simultaneously, appraisal patterns create a stark moral landscape: light-filled, balanced ecosystems and noble lions are positively evaluated as life-sustaining and righteous, whereas darkness, hyenas, vultures, and imbalance are negatively judged as destructive and villainous. Although the film celebrates the beneficial story of the “Circle of Life” and ecological interdependence, it simultaneously naturalises destructive ideologies of hierarchical dominance, anthropocentric kingship, and “might is right,” while completely erasing human agency from environmental harm. Thus, *The Lion King* emerges as an ambivalent ecological text that both inspires reverence for the more-than-human world and subtly reinforces power structures that undermine genuine life-sustaining relationships.

### **Recommendations**

Future research could extend the present ecolinguistic analysis by exploring the significant erasure of human environmental responsibility in *The Lion King*, particularly how the displacement of blame onto animal “villains” (hyenas, Scar) conceals real-world anthropogenic threats. The pervasive anthropomorphism—animals exhibiting human traits of monarchy, betrayal, and heroism—offers rich ground for studies examining how such representations distort authentic nonhuman agency and behaviour. Additionally, an ecofeminist reading of the film, focusing on

gendered patterns of salience and appraisal (e.g., the marginalisation of lionesses despite their ecological centrality, or the valorisation of patriarchal rule), would further illuminate intersections between ecological and gender hierarchies in one of the most influential environmental narratives in popular culture.

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