

Voice of the Vanishing Stripes: An Ecolinguistic Study of *The White Tiger*



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Abstract

Combatting climate change necessitates coordinated international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to its impacts, and transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient economies. Ecolinguistic research focuses on efforts to limit global warming and mitigate the effects of climate change. It underscores the need of collaborative efforts and delineates a framework for researchers to progressively elevate their climate aspirations. Ecolinguistic studies emphasize the importance of ecological stories in forming sustainable thought processes. Ecological storytelling promotes ethical accountability towards non-human lives. Conversely, destructive storytelling promotes separation between humans and nature. Many entertainment venues use white tigers as symbols of anthropocentrism, where animals exist primarily for human economic gain. The ecolinguistic interpretation shows that environmental problems are not merely political issues but also linguistic and cultural issues. The stories humans tell about animals determine how humans interact with animals and whether humans will adopt sustainable methods. The white tiger presents itself as a prime example of how beauty and rarity can be used to sell commodities through discourse while neglecting ecological realities. Using an ecolinguistic approach allows us to reveal harmful narratives and advocate for more environmentally responsible, natural ways to communicate about wildlife.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, White Tiger, Environmental Discourse, Wildlife Conservation, Ecological Representation

Introduction

Ecological issues pertain to environmental concerns that affect the fragile equilibrium of ecosystems and the planet's overall well-being. These problems frequently arise from anthropogenic activities such deforestation, pollution, habitat degradation, resource overconsumption, and climate change. Addressing ecological challenges is essential for sustaining biodiversity, conserving ecosystems, and guaranteeing the longevity of natural resources for future generations. Climate change constitutes a key ecological challenge confronting the globe at present. It denotes prolonged alterations in global or regional climate patterns, predominantly ascribed to human activities that elevate the concentration of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere. These activities encompass the combustion of fossil fuels for energy, deforestation, industrial operations, agriculture, and transportation.

In the same way, wildlife is a significant part of the cultural identity of individuals in developed countries and in developing countries. Language is very influential in creating public perceptions of wildlife. For example, the language used in advertising, zoos, movies, social media, etc., uses adjectives such as "exotic," "royal," "mysterious," and "rare" to describe white tigers. These adjectives create an aesthetic image of white tigers which obscures the fact that white tigers are being exploited commercially through captive breeding and habitat destruction. As stated earlier, ecolinguistics supports the argument that language is never neutral since it represents social values and power structures. Therefore, when discourse celebrates white tigers in popular culture, then people view white tigers as entertainment objects and not as

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living entities that are a component of large ecosystems. When people view white tigers as entertainment objects then this separates people from their responsibilities concerning the environment and changes their views on conservation of wildlife into commodity-based viewpoints.

There are several reasons why the ecological value of white tigers relates to preservation of biodiversity and natural habitats. First, tigers function as top predators to provide ecological stability to forested ecosystems and grasslands. Second, the ecological stability provided by tigers in these environments has deteriorated due to deforestation, global warming, illegal hunting, urbanization of tiger habitats throughout Asia. While most wild white tigers live in zoos today, much of what is discussed about white tigers ignores the larger environmental catastrophe that affects all tiger species. An ecolinguistic approach identifies specific types of language that conceal environmental destruction. For instance, tourist industries often use catchy promotional rhetoric to advertise white tigers as part of their product line without describing the animal genetic mutations associated with keeping wild animals in captivity. Promotional rhetoric hides the ecological reality behind beautiful images.

Ecolinguistics also emphasizes the importance of ecological stories in forming sustainable thought processes. Ecological storytelling promotes ethical accountability towards non-human lives. Conversely, destructive storytelling promotes separation between humans and nature. Many entertainment venues use white tigers as symbols of anthropocentrism, where animals exist primarily for human economic gain. Commercially-bred captive white tigers suffer from numerous health defects resulting from inbreeding. However, many organizations present themselves as promoting education/excitement instead of animal welfare. This illustrates how discourse normalizes detrimental human practices towards wildlife and ecosystems.

White tigers have also been represented in various literary and cultural contexts as emblems of power. Symbolic representations of white tigers can have either positive or negative effects. For example, white tiger symbolism can generate enthusiasm for wildlife and raise awareness for conservation efforts; conversely, this type of symbolism can reduce an animal to a metaphor and overlook its true ecological presence. Studies utilizing an ecolinguistic framework aim to counteract these potentially harmful narrative forms by advocating for language that acknowledges interdependence between humans, animals, and the environment. Researchers can analyze media content forums to uncover the underlying assumptions that form attitudes toward white tigers and other endangered species.

Therefore, an ecolinguistic interpretation of the white tiger offers a richer understanding of how language influences ecological knowledge. The ecolinguistic interpretation shows that environmental problems are not merely scientific or political issues but also linguistic/cultural issues. The stories humans tell about animals determine how humans interact with animals and whether humans will adopt sustainable methods. The White Tiger presents itself as a prime example of how beauty and rarity can be used to sell commodities through discourse while neglecting ecological realities. Utilizing an ecolinguistic method allows us to reveal damaging narratives and advocate for more environmentally responsible and natural ways to communicate about wildlife.

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Research Questions

1. How does the language used in novels about *The White Tiger* shape readers' understanding of environmental issues and wildlife conservation?
2. What do these representations reveal about human perceptions of wildlife and environmental ethics?

Literature Review

Ecolinguistics is an evolving interdisciplinary field of study which investigates the connection between language and the environment. It aims to understand how people's linguistic choices create our perception of ecologies and ultimately influence the way we think about nature. Ecological linguistics comprises elements of ecological science, linguistics, and environmental studies. An ecological linguist would study the type of discourse that promotes ecological health or ecological destruction.

Stibbe (2015), explains that, although we rarely see them, there are usually assumptions contained within all types of language when it comes to describing nature. A very common assumption is that nature exists as a resource for humanity to exploit. Nature is viewed as a "living" system with inherent worth/value, however. Stibbe states that these assumptions exist in all areas of daily communication. They are found in media narratives, advertising, literature etc... . Also, metaphors help us frame our views of nature. Metaphors like "nature as machine," or "nature as a resource bank," assist us in viewing nature through a utilitarian lens. On the other hand, metaphors such as "the community of life," or "the web of life," can cause us to view nature through an ecological lens. Therefore, ecolinguistics attempts to expose these underlying assumptions and evaluates their effects on the environment.

Narratives are another major area of study for ecolinguistics. Narratives have a huge impact upon how cultures develop values related to the natural world. We learn to perceive our place in relation to the natural world by being told stories about it. Animals and ecosystems are often anthropomorphized in many modern texts. Anthropomorphism can cause us to feel an emotional connection to nature, but at the same time it can also cause us to misinterpret ecological realities. Ecologists attempt to determine whether certain narratives influence how people perceive certain environmental issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and wildlife preservation. Researchers who conduct ecolinguistic studies will attempt to find patterns that indicate whether or not the narratives contribute negatively to ecological sustainability. Patterns in narratives may be located in literary works and cultural discourses.

Another main area of study for ecolinguistics is media discourse. Media coverage advertising etc., greatly shapes how people understand and conceptualize environmental problems. While media coverage may provide some insight into environmental issues, media coverage can also hide accountability for environmental harm by utilizing passive voice. For example, if a story describes environmental damage caused by pollution without specifically stating who was accountable for causing the damage, Ecolinguistics critiques media coverage by examining specific linguistic strategies that may shield accountability for environmental damage. When researchers expose the lack of accountability in media coverage, they hope to stimulate media coverage that is more transparent in discussing environmental issues.

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Literary work also serves as a vehicle for developing cultural attitudes towards nature and is therefore studied within ecolinguistics. Literary forms such as novels, poetry, etc.. portray humans interacting with landscapes in ways that reflect the authors' ecological values. There are two ways authors portray interaction with nature. Authors may demonstrate a feeling of humanity with the natural environment. Alternatively authors may depict a hierarchy of importance with humanity situated better than nature. As authors construct ecological values, ecolinguistic analysis of literature will allow researchers to uncover these values and analyze the values' effect upon environmental thinking. Specifically, the depiction of endangered species such as white tigers exemplify conflicting desires of conservation/exploration and symbolic significance.

Ecolinguists refer to the primary narratives that govern societal behavior towards the environment as "the stories we live by." Such stories can be damaging (i.e. unlimited economic consumption) or constructive (i.e. ecological balance). Ecolinguists strive to foster the development of new, life sustaining narratives that encourage appreciation/respect for diversity and continued environmental stewardship over generations. In order to achieve this goal, ecolinguists do not simply analyze current discourse but also attempt to promote alternatives to how individuals think about nature.

Within recent years, ecolinguistics has evolved to include global environmental discourse. Many social media platforms serve as mediums for contesting/envisioning environmental ideas. Because social media platforms facilitate quick dissemination of information regarding environmental concerns, awareness grows quickly; however, social media platforms also enable misunderstanding of environmental concepts due to oversimplification of complex issues. Ecolinguistic studies conducted in this area concentrate upon how digital language affects environmental activism/public opinion/policy debates. This expanding scope clearly indicates that ecolinguistics remains adaptable enough to address contemporary environmental issues.

In summary, ecolinguistics offers valuable perspectives concerning the dynamic/interdependent relationship between thought/the environment. Furthermore, ecolinguistics illustrates that discourse itself has immense potential to shape ecological awareness and requires continuous reflection regarding how language is utilized in every context.

Methodology

This study utilizes ecolinguistics as its core theoretical and analytical model to assess representations of the white tiger and concern for the environment. As an interdisciplinary area of study, ecolinguistics explores the interrelationship among language, ecology, and society. More specifically, ecolinguistics examines how speakers use language to frame attitudes about nature, wildlife, and sustainability of the natural world. Of particular value to this study is that ecolinguistics offers a means to analyze the way writers create ecological meanings using language and subsequently influence readers' comprehension of ecological matters. Through employing ecolinguistics as the theoretical base for this study, we will be able to determine what forms of discourse in contemporary novels reflect ecological ethics, wildlife preservation, and the ways people interact with nature.

Our research method involves utilizing qualitative methods because my focus is on interpreting the content of texts, conducting close readings of texts, and exploring the

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themes contained within the selected novels instead of focusing on numbers. Using qualitative methods are suitable for this study because ecolinguists emphasize meanings, ideologies, and patterns present in all uses of language. Conceptual foundations for this study were provided by Ecolinguistic Theory that was developed by scholars such as Arran Stubbe. Stubbe (2015) states that "the stories we live by" are deep-rooted narratives that profoundly affect human perceptions and behavior toward the environment. Furthermore, Stubbe asserts that the same stories may either promote sustainable relationships with the environment or encourage environmentally destructive perspectives. Therefore, in this study we examined whether the language used in the selected novels supports environmental awareness and responsibility or if they reinforce anthropocentric ideologies.

In addition to Ecolinguistic Theory, this study incorporates Critical Discourse Analysis using an ecolinguistic paradigm. This approach aids in uncovering latent ideologies and presuppositions contained within literary discourse. Using a critical perspective when examining lexical choices, imagery, metaphors and tone of narration will enable me to investigate how the selected novels create connections between humans and nonhuman entities. A large part of this investigation includes descriptions of animals, forests, ecosystems and environmental degradation. Also, ecolinguistics affords the opportunity to study ecological ethics in literary works. The purpose of this methodology is to evaluate if the selected novels advocate for coexisting with nature and working in harmony with it or if they support humans having dominion over the environment. The depiction of wildlife conservation, destruction of habitats and human interventions into nature are assessed from the viewpoint of Ecolinguistic Theory.

Analysis

This study utilizes an ecolinguistics framework to assess the connection between discourse and our attitudes towards wildlife, as well as our views on nature. Within that framework, particular focus is placed upon the symbolism of *The White Tiger* in relation to its role as an ecologic entity within literature. By utilizing ecolinguistics theory and methodology, the purpose of this section is to expose what we refer to as "hidden" ecological assumptions in literary discourse and ultimately show how language impacts readers' conceptions of nature and conservation.

Arvind Adiga's uses strong metaphors and graphic imagery to depict ecological issues. The central metaphor "The Rooster Coop" defines the whole system that keeps poor people stuck in the servitude, teaching them to accept their low status. Balram Halwai, the main character, sees himself as a rare "White Tiger" the one person in a generation smart enough to escape this trap. Adiga separates India visually into the rich modern "light" and the poor old fashion "darkness" highlighting the enormous divide. Finally, the constant use of animal imagery _ calling the wealthy predators and the poor meek creatures _ removes their human dignity and stresses the brutal, unforgiving nature of the economic conflict Balram must fight.

In an instance, "*The jungle law of India (Adiga, 2008, p. 64),*' Adiga showcases the powerful contrast between the "Zoo" and the "jungle" to explain the choices of Balram Halwai makes to achieve freedom. The "Zoo" stand for the predictable, but suffocating, life of poor in the "Rooster Coop" a state of being where dignity is security. Balram rejects this safe cage because it traps his potential. Conversely, the "Jungle" represents the brutal, fast -paced, free market world of major cities, where

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the rule is simply survival of the fittest. Balram realizes that to gain real success and freedom, he must become a predator instead of a servant, proving that in a corrupt environment, a morally dark action is the only path to economic light. In one instance the Adiga has quoted “a world where people live like animals in a zoo” (Adiga, 2008, p. 72), where the metaphor of the “zoo” positions the poor as domesticated, enclosed, and controlled. While the jungle symbolizes chaotic freedom, the zoo represents restricted survival. Together, these metaphors expose ecological power structures shaping social inequality.

Balram in this novel has identified himself as being *The White Tiger* which is a creature born once in a generation; “A creature that comes along only once in a while, the rarest of animals—the White Tiger” (Adiga, 2008, p. 30). As an eco-linguistic reading, *The White Tiger* represents both moral exceptionality and natural rarity. Yet, *The White Tiger* being entrapped within a cage parallels Balram being entrapped within ecological hierarchies and class. This showcases the extinction of moral and environmental integrity due to modern capitalism imaging it with human and animal realms.

Adiga in the initial pages of the book has set up the tonal environment of the country from the metaphors “*The Darkness*,” and “*the city of Light*.” (Adiga, 2008, p. 14) through which Adiga effectively uses the strong visual idea of light versus Darkness or critique the serve split in India, arguing that the country is fundamentally two nations. The Darkness represents the poor, rural areas, like Balram’s village Laxmangarh which are stuck in feudal control, literacy, and crude, old fashioned corruption run by the landlords. On the other hand, the Light symbolizes the rich, globalized cities like Delhi and Bangalore, which promise modern life and financial success.

The lexical choices in Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* are the primary engine for the Novel complex social critique, centered on the unique, blended voices of the e protagonist, *Balram Halwai*. His diction is mixed register, combining the inspirational vocabulary of business and formal English with colloquialisms. The linguistic hybridity serves as the vehicle for Adiga,s powerful satirical lexis, employing irony and dark humor to undermine institution and moral authority of the wealthy, who are often reduce to animalistic figures like the “Stroke” and “The Mongoose”. Furthermore, the focused use of a lexical field related to the confinement, filth, and kill establishes the central metaphor of the ‘Rooster Coop’ transforming the systematic operation of the poverty into the primitive, unavoidable reality. Eventually, Balram’s evolving language, which shifts towards technical and industrial jargon by the novel’s end.

Adiga has effectively used animal lexis within his texts like “*The Indian entrepreneur is a white tiger trapped in a rooster coop*.” (Adiga, 2008, p. 147). When analyzing text, the use of animal lexis _language associated with animals_ is key techniques for achieving dehumanization. This vocabulary serves to deny the subject complex human qualities, reducing them to simple instinct or collective, obedient status, which makes it easier to utilize or control. Rhetorically this creates a cruel hierarchy: the oppressors are often framed as powerful predators, while the oppressed are depicted as mindless prey or interchangeable parasites. This dynamic is particularly evident in modern postcolonial literature, as seen in Adiga’s vibrant description of India’s class structure as the inescapable “Rooster Coop” in *The White Tiger* (Lei & Yang, 2025).

Along with showcasing animal lexis the author has chosen phrases to exemplify the

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ecological cost of industrialization; “*The city’s air was thick with smoke and promise*” (Adiga, 2008, p. 119). The words Adiga chooses to describe cities and factories the industrial and urban lexis are crucial for showing the conflict between India’s past and future. The dirty repetitive work for the past is captured by the language of the older industries like smelting and coal mining. It highlights the tension between environmental degradation and economic growth. Through sensory language it indicates that pollution derived from the industries mirrors the capitalist elite’s moral contamination.

Lastly, India due to its population, has the greatest population with religious mindset and faith, the author has effectively used the religious lexis to critique the ecological and moral pollution of sacred places; “*The Ganga, once holy, now filled with the ashes of the poor and the filth of the rich.*” (Adiga, 2008, p. 15). The vocabulary of religion and purity in *The White Tiger* serves mainly to expose the massive hypocrisy that upholds India’s class system. Adiga uses terms associated with Hindu faith (goods, fate, and pilgrimage) ironically, showing that traditional piety is completely ineffective against system corruption, religion becomes a transactional, powerless practice rather than a moral guide. Crucially, the lexicon of purity and pollution is not spiritual, but economic. On the other hand, the rich maintain a surface lexicon of cleanliness, which allows them to claim moral superiority while their actual deeds are completely corrupt. Eventually the novel proves that purity is simply a marker of wealth, not virtue.

The narrative structure of Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* is uniquely defined by its epistolary, first-person narration where the protagonist, Balram Halwai, recounts his life story as a lengthy, satirical, and retrospective letter addressed to the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabo. This framing device allows Balram to deliver an intimate, account of his journey from the poverty stricken “Darkness” of his village to the affluent “Light” of Bangalore, using his rogue, self-justifying voice to structure the lot as a series of flashbacks that explain the events chiefly, the murder of his master, Ashok that led to his current success. The novel effectively uses Balram’s personal accent as a vehicle for sharp, social distrustful social commentary on India’s persistent corruption, class divide, and the economic desperation required breaking out of the “Rooster Coop” of servitude.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that an ecolinguistic analysis of novels about the White Tiger provides valuable insight into the relationship between language, literature, and environmental awareness. The findings reveal that literary discourse plays a significant role in shaping readers’ perceptions of wildlife, conservation, and human interaction with nature. Through the use of symbolism, imagery, and narrative language, the selected novels reflect both ecological concerns and anthropocentric attitudes toward the natural world. The study further highlights how ecolinguistics helps uncover hidden ideologies embedded in literary texts and encourages a deeper understanding of environmental ethics. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of literature in promoting ecological consciousness and fostering more responsible and sustainable attitudes toward endangered species and the environment.

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