ECOLINGUISTICS AND POSITIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: CONVERGENT PATHWAYS

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Abstract: This paper explores connections between Ecolinguistics and Positive Discourse Analysis, focusing on an eco-friendly farm in Norfolk which features in a long-running BBC programme, 'the Countryside Hour'. Both ecolinguistics and positive discourse analysis, as relatively new disciplines, stand in some need of definition, especially regarding their relationship with the more consolidated paradigm of CDA which, of course, is itself not characterised by general agreement on methodological matters (Flowerdew 2008, Stibbe 2017). This study applies some of the notions found in the practical toolkit of CDA such as framing, presupposition, metaphor analysis, pragmatics and relevance theory and explores their functioning as heuristic methods in data that is regarded as ecologically 'positive'. Unlike traditional critical studies of harmful environmental practices which expose deviant discursive practices, the starting point is discourse that concords with current mediated notions of environmental sustainability. The aim is not simply to give such contexts, and such discourse, publicity, and nor is it to seek solace in 'discourse that inspires, encourages, heartens, discourse we like, that cheers us along' (Martin 1999, pp. 51–52). Rather, it is to shed light on underlying processes at the level of ideologies (in the sense of Fairclough 2003: 9); to make manifest thoughts, feelings and discourses which are felt to be 'positive', in a mirror image of what occurs in CDA studies.

Keywords: positive discourse analysis; ecolinguistics; ecological farming; ideology; implicature; High Ash Farm.

1. Introduction

Ecolinguistics as a field of discourse studies can be dated back to a 1990 paper by M.A.K. Halliday (included in Halliday and Webster 2010) and, as Law and Matthiessen (2019) say, has since become established as a field of research and activity. However, thirty years is a fairly short time as such things go, and newcomers to ecolinguistics may still question what underlying theories of language and society are involved, what are the analytical tools, and so on.

One straightforward answer to such questions is to view ecolinguistics simply as the application of methodologies in the better-known field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to ecological topics. It is not hard to find studies which tend to confirm this idea (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001; Vasta 2005; Stibbe 2012, 2015; Fill and Penz 2018). In his 2015 work Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories we live by, for example, Arran Stibbe adopts – among other CDA techniques deployed elsewhere in the book – the critical notion of erasure, familiar to linguists through the work of Van Leeuwen (1996) on social actors, focusing, in other words, on "participants which are [..] suppressed, backgrounded, excluded or erased from texts" (Stibbe 2015: 145). When these representational strategies are applied to animals involved in human-centred processes such as experimentation with drugs or the production of meat – to take examples from the book – we lose sight of the animals, and process the message as if the human perspective were all that mattered. When Stibbe explains that erasure may be carried out linguistically through devices such as "passives, metonymy, nominalisations and hyponyms", he draws on a consolidated body of work in CDA that deals precisely with these features (Billig 2008; Van Leeuwen 2009).

If ecolinguistics were no more than this, it would still merit attention because of the intrinsic pull of such studies, which underscore some of the most crucial issues of our time; however, it would perhaps lose its claim to represent a separate field, and could be subsumed within CDA alongside other topics of social concern. In fact, ecolinguistics offers a broader perspective: across a range of studies, it is seen to embrace insights from ecology, ecosophy, anthropology, eco-criticism, religion, literature, the arts, primitive cultures and emerging eco-related sciences, to explore perspectives on the role of language in shaping and governing what Stibbe (2015: 181) describes as "the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment."

The perspectives it offers have the potential to challenge traditional patterns of western, anthropocentric thought (Crist and Kopnina 2014): it is necessary, indeed, to revise categories of knowledge that have become "naturalised", in the sense outlined by Roland Barthes (Barthes 2006), and to open a discursive space for the discussion of radical ideas. As Capra (1995: 20), summarising the eco-philosophy of Arne Naess, puts it:

> Shallow ecology is anthropocentric. It views humans as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or use value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans from the natural environment, nor does it separate anything else from it. It does not see the

world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic values of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life.

Here, a "shallow ecology" is critiqued, but the words also apply to our typical way of treating the natural world. The ongoing ecological disaster tends to be viewed primarily as a human tragedy; it is awful because it will mean the end of our way of life, and of all the things that we routinely take for granted. Opposed to this is a perspective that would view the loss of habitats for animals as equally tragic. In this perspective the non-human world is animate, its denizens recover the agency they lose in an "instrumental", human-centric version of existence.

It must be stressed that this is not a hippy, extremist, or escapist vision; rather, it represents an eco-philosophy that is still found in some primitive cultures (Mead 1932; Bird-David 1999; Stringer 1999; Praet 2014) and is even present in British culture, for example in poetry from the Romantic period (Piper 2013; Goatly 2017). Goatly points out, in the last-mentioned study, the grammatical means for construing agency, and how poets frequently afford it to animals, birds and other non-human objects. In Wordsworth's famous sonnet "On Westminster Bridge", for example, we find the line "The river glideth at its own sweet will", and evidence of an animistic vision[1] shared by many Romantics. In our own time, industrialisation and other exploitative practices of unchained capitalism respond to different philsophical currents, which have led the world to the brink of disaster (Sweezy 2004; Newell 2013).

This study is a tentative exploration of these issues; the aim is to focus not on negative perspectives of environmental disaster, but rather on discourse that is environmentally sound, that embodies aspects of a deep ecological perspective, and hence offers alternative models of thought and socio-linguistic practise, currently so urgently required. The aim is to suggest pathways towards a convergence between two fairly new fields, ecolinguistics and Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), about which more will be said below.

2. Context

The last few years have seen many significant socio-political moments, such as Greta Thunberg's speech to the UN in 2019, that have collectively marked out environmentalism as one of the dominant counter-cultural ideologies of today (Eder 1990; Peterson Del Mar 2014, Forte 2020). There has been an increment in cases of wildfires, droughts, tornadoes, and flooding; and the melting of icecaps and glaciers, the ongoing destruction of the Brazilian rainforest, have all gathered pace. Moreover, as Eckstein et al. (2021: 5) report, "developing countries are particularly affected by the impact of climate change".

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[1] (Piper 1959) describes Coleridge's thinking about nature in his early work: "In these poems Coleridge saw the natural world as consisting not of inert matter, but of purposive and intelligent natural forces, which he called Monads, using the word in its eighteenth-century sense of an atom of matter (or rather, here, of force). These Monads were themselves part of a larger organism, the Infinite Mind, and were engaged in working out its purpose."

This paper focuses on issues related to agriculture and the husbandry of rural land, another area pivotally involved in an overall picture of environmental devastation, alongside more prominent narratives of industrial pollution. It was "Silent Spring", Rachel Carson's study of the poisonous effects of DDT on birdlife in the United States, that gave environmentalism the kickstart it needed in the early sixties. The intervening years have seen far-reaching changes in the organisation of rural spaces and food production methods in most nations of the first world (Hansen et al 2001), with – in the UK, for example – increasing mechanisation, decreasing workforces, fewer tenant farmers, increases in the size of farms and experimentation with genetically modified crops (Sheail 1995). As Sheail indicates, these processes have inflicted severe damage on wildlife and habitats that had been part of Britain's landscape and way of life for centuries.

However, it is also true that these harmful effects have been balanced to some extent by counter-movements that increasingly illustrate the diffusion of environmentally positive ideals, whether these are private organisations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, or supra-national quasi-political bodies such as the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution or the Global Green Growth Institute[2]. At a popular level, "environmentalism" has become a buzzword, a powerful ideology with rizomatic connections to a range of social phenomena that both support and feed off it: vegetarianism, veganism, Eastern religions and practices like meditation, yoga or Tai Chi; diet therapy, holistic medicine, natural healing, tree hugging, biodance, and so on. Furthermore, traditional practices and sports that involve spending time outdoors have been given a massive boost from these underlying philosophical currents, as have everyday practices like cycling or walking to work rather than using cars (Loland 2021). The therapeutic qualities of gardening are also well-known (Diamant and Waterhouse 2010; Joyce and Warren 2016).

The beneficial effects of physical contact with nature are emphasised in the "care farm" movement (Hine, et al, 2008; Hassink, et al, 2014), where social services and farmers combine to assist in treating people with a range of conditions. Organic farms, meanwhile, which were originally "driven by an emerging environmentalism and health concerns about exposure to pesticides, antibiotics and hormones" (Seufert, et al, 2017: 11), represent one of the fastest growing sectors of food production in first world countries.

The central character in this paper, Chris Skinner, prominent UK naturalist and BBC broadcaster, must be viewed against this socio-historical and cultural backdrop. He inherited a farm on the outskirts of Norwich which he has turned into a haven for wildlife of all kinds, about which he has been talking on local radio for many years. In one square mile are found red deer, fallow deer, muntjac deer, Chinese water deer, hares, badgers, foxes, buzzards, goshawks, little owls; green, greater and lesser spotted woodpeckers, all kinds of birds, butterflies and moths, trees, flowers and fungi, insects, spiders, and snakes. These plants and creatures constitute the topic of the various episodes, which provide a vivid picture of life on an English farm, with Skinner at pains to stress the balance of

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[2] Global Alliance on Health and Pollution: online at https://gahp.net/, last visit 23.09.2021. Global Green Growth Institute: https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/, last visit 23.09.2021.

nature, and occasionally reminding listeners of a deep ecosophy, implicit in homely utterances like "they've all got just as much right to be here as I have". Skinner appears to lead the life of a typical farmer, up all hours and out in all weathers, but from listening to the episodes alone it is impossible to answer certain questions concerning the viability of his lifestyle. For example, farming is notoriously precarious from an economic perspective, and it would be useful to know if High Ash Farm turns in a profit, or whether Skinner's ecological activities are an expensive indulgence[3].

It is worth reflecting, for example, on Skinner's annual practice of seeding enormous fields with "over winter wild birdseed mix", so that species of bird which rely on seeds to get them through winter may survive. This may appear quixotic, but in point of fact Skinner uses government grants for this purpose, a circumstance that underlines what has already been hinted at about the effective political reach of ecological principles and practices in everyday agricultural life[4].

In this paper then, Chris Skinner's discourse about the environment is taken as a model from which positive underlying ideologies may be taken, following the design of proposing pathways whereby ecolinguistics and positive discourse analysis might converge.

3. Positive Discourse Analysis

Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) emerged in the early 2000s following some prominent publications (e.g. Martin 1994 and 2004; Martin and Rose 2003) by Jim Martin, a leading exponent of Systemic Functional Linguistics, (SFL), the Hallidayan paradigm on which many critical studies have been based. Before turning to PDA, however, it will be worth briefly discussing CDA, which may be seen as discourse analytical research that studies how "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the political context" (Van Dijk 2001: 352).

A critique of CDA is beyond the scope of this paper; some of the main points in a well-known debate are summarised by Bartlett (2012), as cherry-picking data that confirm the analyst's pre-formed opinions (see also Widdowson 2004; Abbamonte this volume), insufficient coverage of texts on the topic analysed, over-reliance on SFL, etc. There is also the question of impact, which asks how credible/useful it is for academics to continually decry harmful hegemonic discourses in studies that have no visible effect on the abuses in question. To put this another way, the products of linguistic research are arguably not influencing

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[3] The point is crucial if we want to suggest that the husbandry carried out at High Ash Farm could be a model of best practice for UK farming generally. In other words, it has to be understood whether economic and ecological goals may work in harmony, or if they are fundamentally opposed (Shmelev 2012). If it is possible to have a rich biosphere and at the same time an efficiently functioning, economically viable farming sector then this would clearly represent the best of both worlds.

[4] The British government is prepared to foot the bill for this initiative. See Gov.UK: https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/winter-bird-food-ab9, last visit 23.09.2021.

the producers of the discourse, and hence their effects remain circumscribed within a restricted, largely ineffectual area at the margins of social life (see Chomsky's critique of CDA, discussed in de Beaugrande 1991). Yet CDA originally aimed at the redress of inequalities on an ambitious scale. Kress (1996: 15), for example, explains that the intention was to "bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis by uncovering its workings and its effects through the analysis of potent cultural objects – texts – and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order[5]."

Reflecting on some of these issues, especially the latter, the emergence of PDA may have allowed analysts to draw breath, to explore other veins of linguistic research, that might in the long run afford more substantial results than CDA has managed, in its forty or so years of activity.

To a degree, the "why" and the "how" of PDA still remain topics for discussion (see Abbamonte, this volume). As far as the first is concerned, Martin appears to emphasise the psychological effects for the analyst, who is urged to study "discourse that inspires, encourages, heartens, discourse we like, that cheers us along" (Martin 1999: 51–52). Martin does make it clear that PDA is still a form of socially engaged research, and suggests that the differing focus might have a strategic motivation:

> The lack of positive discourse analysis [...] cripples our understanding of how change happens, for the better, across a range of sites – how feminists re-make gender relations in our world, how indigenous people overcome their colonial heritage, how migrants renovate their new environs and so on. And this hampers design and perhaps even discourages it since analysts would rather tell us how the struggle was undone than how freedom was won. (Martin 2004:182)

However, it is interesting that the focus on hegemonic discourse typical of CDA, the emphasis on philosophical forerunners like Marx, Foucault, Althusser or Habermass appears to be softening, in such a description, to a position that appears in some way more tolerant of structural inequalities. In Martin's words, we need "a complementary focus on community, taking into account how people get together and make room for themselves in the world – in ways that redistribute power *without necessarily struggling against it*" (Martin 2004: 183, my emphasis)

The question of what methodology PDA should adopt to analyse texts has no ready answer, since unlike CDA and its close connections with SFL, there seems no logical reason why it should be connected to any particular tradition. Unless, indeed, Martin's own links with SFL should suggest it as the most appropriate methodology, but Martin himself avoids this path, preferring to use a more eclectic approach in his own work in PDA[6]. Tentatively, then, since PDA is still

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[5] Kress himself, however, in the same chapter, is also concerned to promote a shift from 'deconstructive activity, to productive activity' for analysts, and outlines a primitive project for positive discourse analysis (ibid: 15-16).
[6] In Martin 2004, for example, he uses the Hallidayan conceptualisation of the metafunctions together with some notions from strict CDA (pronoun reference, implicit ideology) and a focus on narrative structure.

a fresh canvas, it would seem that, within reason, any analytical system that works in discourse analysis might be able to do so in PDA. In this study an approach derived from the pragmatics of interaction and relevance theory is used, focusing on implicit ideologies as these may be traced in discourse.

4. Methodology

A common feature in all approaches to discourse that focus on the construction of meaning is the notion that there generally is – some would argue, there is always – more in an utterance than is contained in the surface, or referential, meaning of the words themselves (Leech 2016). These additional components in meaning may be conveyed by non-verbal methods of communication such as intonation, voice quality, emphasis, gesture, body-language, and so on (Mehrabian 2007; Underhill 2008). Or, they may reside in a cognitive space that is located between the words (in written discourse, between the lines), requiring interpretative effort on the part of the hearer to arrive at the speaker's precise meaning. In discursive interaction, these processes are ongoing as the hearer becomes the speaker, and the meaning is progressively mutually constructed as the dialogue goes on (Kecskes 2016; Bondi 2018).

In our data, which is taken from a radio programme, BBC's "The Countryside Hour", this interactive dimension is less prominent. The discourse occurs mainly in monological form, in which the speaker (Skinner) addresses his remarks not to his immediate interlocutor who has asked him a question, but rather to an invisible audience, whose instruction and entertainment represent the goal of the programme.

It is therefore necessary to apply analysis to explicate the ongoing discourse in pragmatic terms, focusing on the following: relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2015), on what can be inferred or what the speaker implies (Sperber and Wilson, 1986), as well as on what is presupposed (Levinson 1983). In doing so, the attention is not only on the speaker's meanings, but on what it is possible to appreciate about his likely audience, their attitudes and probable reactions, based on what the speaker himself assumes about their likely ideologies, in the sense outlined by Fairclough (2003):

> Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation. This 'critical' view of ideology, seeing it as a modality of power, contrasts with various 'descriptive' views of ideology as positions, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, etc. of social groups without reference to relations of power and domination between such groups.

This citation begins with what is surely the most usual way of thinking about "ideology", i.e. as relating principally to the realm of power, politics, the dominion of one social group over another, and so on. Here it has been decided to focus on the second aspect, which Fairclough here calls a "descriptive" understanding of the word, and explains in terms of the attitudes, beliefs, etc.,

that people have. In this sense, "ideology" can be glossed as what people think, based on opinions, beliefs and prejudices derived from their life experiences. It is, of course, plain that such opinions have the potential to become political and may become political whenever the subject who holds them is engaged by a relevant political question[7].

The realm of ideology in discourse is accessible via the tools of pragmatic enquiry indicated above, and constitutes the focus of this study. Below follows an example of the method, applied to a fragment of Skinner's discourse in an episode of "The Countryside Hour":

Table 1. From The Countryside Hour (22/09/2011)

L	Text	Comment
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	Some birds will do that they will bring their own nesting material and sometimes if there is nesting material in there the bird when it inspects the box will think "Oh dear, somebody else's already inhabiting that". But a bit of a trick if you want to attract sparrows to a particular nest once you put a terraced box up, for example, is they're the world's messiest nesters, sparrows, tree sparrows in particular they're all members of the African Weaver bird family, which make really scruffy nests is to just sort of poke a little bit of dried grass or straw in the nest hole entrance and then the sparrows will come and investigate.	Detailed focus on the sparrow's perspective, as well as presupposing interest in such details from listeners

Before proceeding to analyse the text, it is necessary to consider the processes whereby what is implicit in discourse is made manifest to hearers or readers, by means of cognitive processes which are not fully understood yet (Sperber and Wilson 1995), but engage the listeners' knowledge of "words, syntactic structure, overall meaning (topics), discourse structures and aspects of context" (Van Dijk 2000). On the basis of these, listeners form hypotheses about probable meanings (Van Dijk, op.cit), following the application of a deductive logic (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 68). There is some consensus that these implicit meanings are not certain, demonstrable meanings but remain at the level of reasonable working hypotheses (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 70) that guide our contributions to conversation as well as our behaviour.

A feature of Skinner's talk, for example, is that birds have agency (see introduction); they "do" things, they "bring" things (1), they "inspect" (3), "think" (4), and "come and investigate" (12). From this, certain things can be inferred about Skinner's understanding of birds; that they have their own habits and thoughts (in fact, he represents them anthropomorphically in 4-5, and as if the birds possessed human grammar), that their actions are deliberate not random, and so on. The bird, moreover, is not "just" a common sparrow, but has genealogical specification and family membership (9) that affects its behaviour

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[7] For example, a patriotic conception of Britain at the level of personal cognition will most likely become political when there is a vote on Britain's membership of the EU.

(9-10). The inference is that sparrows, as members of a family which stretches down to Africa, are more important than is generally allowed for in human accounts.

Inferential analysis also allows us to appreciate something of the cognitive processes of the sparrow – at least, to the extent that Skinner's assumptions regarding them are valid. From the description of the "trick" (5), we can see that Skinner is dealing with a specific problem – people put up nesting boxes but the birds will not use them. It can be assumed, from the solution that he offers (10-12) that this is because the nest box has an alien, unnatural aspect, from the birds' perspective. The solution works, presumably because the birds are attracted by the straw, a natural object, and gradually overcome their resistance to the human artefact.

In a cognitive dimension somewhere 'behind', in a supporting or enfolding role with respect to these surface meanings are implicit ideologies, in the sense discussed above, at the level of the speaker's ideas, perspectives, beliefs, convictions, attitudes and values. It is plain that for Skinner sparrows matter, that he knows much more about them than most people, that he considers it important to provide homes for them, that they have specific anxieties concerning human objects, specific behavioural characteristics like scruffiness (10), and curiosity (12).

Much can also be inferred concerning Skinner's assumptions about listeners, applying the well-known CDA devices of pronoun reference ("you", 5, 6), and presupposition. Skinner presupposes, for example, that they are the sort of person that puts up bird boxes – evidence that they care about animals – and worry when they see that the boxes are not being used. For them, the natural world is important, and to a degree they will share Skinner's sense that the company of birds has a value, it enriches their lives. Finally, Skinner's digression about the Weaver birds (9) can be interpreted in this sense: he goes out of his way to provide them with the information since he assumes that they will find it of interest.

5. High Ash Farm and the Countryside Hour

High Ash farm is located at Caistor St. Edmund's, a village two miles south of Norwich, and its owner, naturalist Chris Skinner, broadcasts about it once a week on BBC Radio Norfolk. The programmes have a loose format; typically, part of an episode is devoted to answering listeners' questions, part to a trip around the farm in the company of an interviewer discussing topical issues. When Skinner inherited the farm, it was a shooting estate, but he gradually altered the setup, and now he farms it for grain and niche products for bio markets; he also provides stabling and facilities for horse-riding. As mentioned above, the farm adopts a different attitude towards the environment compared with that current in most modern farms. It appears, in fact, an axiom of farming that "the biodiversity value of farmland declines with increasing yield" (Green 2005: 552). As we have said, recent decades have seen increased recognition among governments of the importance of balancing environmental and productivity

goals, but research suggests that wherever the former are privileged, the latter inevitably suffer (Gabriel et al. 2010).

For Skinner, it is plain that the bottom line of High Ash Farm is to achieve and maintain a rich natural environment in which predators are as welcome as prey, and humble species of butterfly are as keenly celebrated as mammals with a higher profile such as badgers or fallow deer. His ecosophy extends to moles, who are permitted to disfigure his lawn with their earth movements, while the standard practice is to cull them[8]. It is also common in the UK to cull badgers because of the link between their activities and the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in cattle (Downs et al. 2019); at High Ash they are highly valued. On the other side of the debate, many UK farmers claim to have positive attitudes towards the animals they rear, that their conditions in intensive farms are better than they would enjoy in the wild (Serpell 1999); however, as has been seen, a widespread lack of tolerance towards wildlife appears to be an intrinsic feature of modern agriculture itself (Conover and Decker 1991).

Episodes of the programme are regularly devoted to creatures that most humans largely ignore – spiders, ants, wasps, hornets, bats, hover flies. For Skinner, these creatures' lives all have a value, and a place, and he is sometimes heard to bemoan what he terms our "war' against nature and animals, wishing instead for a world that recognises the rights of all animals – and not just humans – to be alive, and to follow their own individual schemes of living.

6. Data – The Countryside Hour

In this section, two extracts from an episode of "The Countryside Hour" are explored using the approach outlined above. Relevant examples have been selected in the terms of this study, guided by the intrinsic interest of the fragments. It should be stressed that they have not been hand-picked because they appear to fit some theory: similar findings would emerge from almost any part of Skinner's discourse, taken more or less at random[9].

In the first extract, as well as Skinner's environmental philosophies, we learn much concerning the ideology of a listener to the programme. Presuppositions and inferences have been identified and collected in a key below the text (Presupposition: P; Inference: I).

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[8] Many farmers view moles as vermin and have them destroyed. BBC Manchester, https://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2008/11/12/121108_molecatcher_feature .shtml, last visit 26.09.2021.
[9] This is not surprising, since what is at stake is largely the implicit philosophies - or 'ideology' – of the central character, and there is no reason to suppose it should vary greatly from one broadcast to another. The most we can expect is that different topics might bring out different aspects of Skinner's thinking about the environment.

Table 2. Countryside hour (ii) 24/02/2020[10]

1	Gudgin: John Reed lives on Unthank Road in Norwich and he says for years
2	we've fed the foxes and watched them with low level lights in the garden they
3	came every night and we recognized individuals and named them[11]. Sometimes
4	there would be up to four of the foxes altogether however about 12 months ago
5	this all stopped and we've not seen one at all since then. Do you think they've
6	been shot or what, have you heard anything about the Norwich fox
7	population?[P1,2, 3]
8	Skinner: Yes, I have heard about the Norwich fox population and quite a number
9	of those foxes were actually um culled. Sadly there were some complaints about
10	them and there was a professional marksman came in uh close to the Unthank
11	Road area there were complaints about foxes in the garden and foxes making a
12	lot of noise at night[12]and unfortunately I think six were culled whether they were
13	the particular ones or not, but there is another set quite close, another earth I
14	should say, quite close to Sainsbury's in the middle of Norwich on the old Brazen
15	Gate railway line so there's some more foxes there and there's also some on
16	Mousehold Heath so they've been spared yeah yes well they they're not known
17	about necessarily because you know they do distribute themselves, quite right
18	that, the reason they're near the brazen gate is um at uh where the old railway
19	line comes in under Hall Road um there's a row of shops there and uh there's a
20	fish and chip shop and quite a lot of food waste is left there for leftovers from
21	the chip shop there and they thrive quite well on that it's near their railway arch
22	but they are pretty well safe there unless again somebody complains and they're
23	culled it's not illegal to do that[13]you there are professional people that will come
24	in under license and dispose of them it's always sad because people get very
25	attached to their foxes and uh yes so it's just one of those things that happen[14]it's
26	a bit sad.

Key

Presupposition (P) 1 = the caller presupposes that when a fox disappears there is a chance that it will have been shot;

P 2 = caller presupposes that Skinner, as an authority on Norwich wildlife, will know what has happened to the foxes.

P3 = presupposes that these foxes are part of a wider "population" in the Norwich area.

Inference (I) 1 = the caller has a strong interest in wildlife, and affection for the foxes;

I2 = foxes making noises at night might be causally connected to their being shot;

I3 = wards off the notion that what has been done is illegal;

I4 = aligns the episode with other, "natural" phenomena.

Implicit in the question is the caller's concern for wildlife in general, which evidently underlies his interest in the foxes. The family devotes time to observing the foxes (2), distinguishing between individual animals (3), and going so far as to name them. Of the practice of giving animals names Borkfelt (2011: 122) says:

> We name individual animals when we regard them as special and it is often
> an expression of fondness, which may end up being subversive to practices

that can be seen as harmful to the animal. We regard an animal with a name differently and sometimes an individual animal with a name—even a fictitious animal—may function as an ambassador and change perceptions of an entire species, as one can argue Flipper may have done for dolphins or the 1995 film Babe did for pigs.

An attitude of fondness towards the foxes can be inferred from the caller's comments; they become part of the family's quality of life, they represent a way of interacting with nature, with the wild, the non-human. When the foxes disappear, a significant gap is left behind, and the caller is sufficiently disturbed to make enquiries about them via local radio. From Skinner's reply, it can be inferred that he is an appropriate source of information, indeed an expert on local wildlife, since he knows all about the case of the foxes (8-9). He provides detailed information, not just about the Unthank Road foxes but about the Norwich fox population in general (8-23). Skinner's remarks go beyond the local issue to address societal norms and the axiologies of modern urban life. From I2, which accounts for the episode in terms of "complaints" about the foxes in gardens "making noises at night" (11-12), it can be inferred that our society's laws uphold the rights of residents to a good night's sleep above the animals' right to exist. To a degree, Skinner's attitude towards this state of things is not confrontational: rather, he represents the action as not illegal (23), as carried out by professionals (23) under license (24), and he uses a euphemism "dispose of" (23), perhaps to avoid raising the emotional temperature. Indeed, in (25) he represents the episode as "just one of those things that happen", which naturalises it. Naturalisation, a heuristic device found in Barthes (2006) and frequently encountered in CDA (Fairclough 1995, Chouliaraki 2008), (re)presents phenomena that in reality are dependent on specific human choices as simply part of "the way things are", things which should be accepted without protest. Instead of attributing responsibility to the human agents, the shooting of the foxes is aligned with other natural phenomena like floods, hurricanes, etc., about which nothing can or should be done by humans.

As well as these presuppositions and inferences, there are other implicit features, some of which may be briefly mentioned. The discussion of the fish and chip shop's practice of leaving leftover food outside (20-21) feeds into an implicit argument in favour of the foxes' presence; i.e., modern human life is wasteful (20), by getting rid of this excess food the foxes are providing a service of some kind, their right to live is thereby underlined. Finally, it should be noted that Skinner refers to the railway arch with a possessive pronoun, "their" (21), rather than the definite article, endowing the foxes with a capacity for possession, the pragmatics of which are comparable to those associated with agency, which are discussed above (see introduction)[11].
In the next extract, Skinner is replying to a listener's question regarding a photo taken of a bird, possibly a starling, nesting in the cavity wall of their house:

[11] There has been some research about whether animals can 'have' rights (e.g. Favre 2009), but the question of whether they can be said to have things, in the sense of quasi-human ownership, is as yet unexplored as far as I know. This, indeed, is not a case of actual possession; however, Skinner uses an idiomatic phrase to confer a kind of ownership of the railway bridge on the foxes, the kind present when somebody is said to go to "*their* favourite café".

Table 3. Countryside hour (ii) 24/02/2020[12]

1	It looks like a starling to me. Perfect picture and it's an absolute typical nest site
2	it's exploring it probably has laid eggs already, many starlings have done. You'll
3	see the murmurations[P1] that are quite common across the country are diminishing
4	by considerable numbers each day. We're into milder weather, longer hours of
5	daylight, the main trigger for birds to start pairing up and nesting and egg
6	laying[I1]..it stimulates the protruding gland at the base of the head. Anybody that
7	keeps poultry, it's been quite dark over the winter months, you can add light at the
8	beginning of the day and the end of the extend the hours of light that the poultry
9	is exposed to, and that will precipitate um earlier egg laying as well[I2], so um..very
10	typical spot for them, very safe in there as well, and probably nesting in the cavity
11	or just inside on the ledge at the top of the wall. They don't really make a nest with
12	much material as such, it's often a little scraping, some dust, occasionally they'll
13	take a few feathers in, maybe a little bit of dry grass and the eggs are beautifully
14	clear blue, same color blue, sky blue, as a song thrush's egg but without the little
15	brown speckling on which the song thrush sat, and a song thrush will make a
16	beautiful cup shaped nest lined with mud.[P2] Starling's nest is much cruder because
17	it's usually in a hole, old woodpecker's holes are a great favorite, and you'll often
18	hear the male starling just singing or um courting his favourite female[I3] with his
19	head just after the woodpecker, just attracting any passing females, and the more
20	variety and complexity of his song, which is often mimicry, the more likely is to
21	attract a mate.[P3] Just listen to this, this is one starling [recording of starling song].
22	It's not a chicken, this is a starling, this is the starling, so there's really a list of
23	where they've been feeding during the day, and so it's a list of good sites to visit.[P4]
24	You hear this sound, you're likely to get some food, obviously a chicken run or a
25	bantam more precisely in this case is a good place to find some food. So you know
26	whether she the lady of his life[I3] or he will certainly know where those sites are,
27	and uh so they're really um very energetic at this time of the year, and very
28	importantly they bathe together as well. This is a freshly hatched brood with mum
29	and dad in my bird bath [recording]. Cleanliness is next to godliness absolutely
30	and feather care, even at this time of the year is crucial when you have to get
31	through dark nights... so it's nothing like bathing with a friend, they say.[I4]

Key
P1 = Listeners will know what a 'murmuration' is;
P2 = Presupposes listener interest in this lengthy digression from the original topic of the listener's query;
P3 = Complexity of song is attractive to female starlings;
P4 = Presupposes the pragmatic purposes of the starling's song.

I1 = a connection between the phenomenon described here – birds pairing up and nesting – and the diminution of the murmurations referred to in the previous sentence;
I2 = the inference is that some listeners might keep chickens and be interested in how to stimulate egg laying;
I3 (& I4) = these anthropomorphic references are a reminder that, like people, birds' relationships matter to them, and their behaviour patterns are comparable to what occurs in the human world.

A murmuration is an event that occurs when a flock of birds, typically starlings, gather together and form dynamic patterns, swaying up and down, moving across countryside or townscape as if they had one mind. Skinner takes for granted that listeners know this (P1), i.e. he uses the term with no explanation; it is safe to assume that listeners to "The Countryside Hour" have sufficient ecological knowledge. Skinner displays the knowledge of a specialist ornithologist, as he goes on to explain why there are fewer murmurations at the moment than formerly, since the birds, moved by seasonal increasing light, have by now paired up and begun nesting. Listeners are expected to provide the logical connectors between the clauses in 4-6 (I1). From these details, we can infer what in other programmes Skinner has explained explicitly, that the purpose of the murmuration is to facilitate the birds' getting to know one another, as a preliminary to courtship and pairing up. The detail relating to egg laying and the increase of light (7-9) is an aside, probably directed at listeners who keep chickens. Again, this allows us to infer something about the characteristics of the intended audience (Kjeldsen 2018).

In point of fact, much of the extract is something of a digression. The questioner simply wanted Skinner to identify a bird; Skinner deals with this immediately (1), and only directly refers to the listener's question in 1-2, coming back to it briefly in 11. This is quite typical of his style in the Countryside Hour, riffing on listeners' questions to cover topics that he knows will interest them – here he discusses the habits of starlings (1-4, 16-31), techniques in poultry farming (7-10), the colour of thrush eggs, their nesting habits (16-18), complexity of the starling's song (22-25).

This last topic allows us to observe Skinner using presupposition and inference himself, to account for the "meaning" of birdsong. The recording consists of a 30 second burst of starling's song, which he assumes is directed at the bird's mate, wherein the voices of other birds – curlew, swallow, bantam hen, etc. – are clearly audible, with Skinner announcing each in turn. The starling is mimicking these other birds, and in 22-25, Skinner suggests an interpretation of the sounds as providing the female starling with a "list" (22-23) of good feeding sites (P4). From this, it can be inferred that, according to Skinner, birdsong is not simply the production of random sounds, reducible to functional explanations connected to the protection of territory and other basic goals, as has been suggested[13]. (Rather, it is hypothesised that birdsong has a fuller meaning than is usually acknowledged: the bird is effectively using a form of oral communication, whose message can be glossed as "go there, you remember where the chickens are – I went there today and I got something to eat".

Finally, the somewhat anthropomorphic references to family life (I3; 27-31), the coy reference to "the lady of his life" (26), and the description of "mum and dad" with the family bathing (28-29), suggest the inference that starlings enjoy something akin to human family life, and share similar communal rituals.

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[13] For a discussion of these points see Hauser et al 2002; Marler and Slabbekoorn 2004; Gentner et al 2006; Hedeager 2012.

7. Conclusion

As Martin says, proposing a ten year moratorium on CDA: "we do need to move beyond a preoccupation with demonology, beyond a singular focus on semiosis in the service of abusive power" (Martin 2004: 184). However, even in a study like the present, a critical perspective is never far away. The ideologies celebrated as positive in this study – deep knowledge of the habits of animals and birds, respect for the environment, a care for living creatures, and so on – contrast markedly with current hegemonic attitudes and social practices within the UK. It is sufficient for a few residents to have their sleep disturbed, and to complain about animal noises, for a marksman to be sent for. That this is completely legal highlights a principle that is naturalised in our societies: if there is a conflict between human and animal needs, the former will win out, at the cost of even the animals' most basic need. Skinner is apparently reluctant to appear as an aggressive crusader for wildlife interests; his is a nuanced environmentalism, which may go so far as to recognise the rights of townsfolk to a good night's sleep.

In connection with the crude realities of animal treatment, as Trampe (2018) underlines, linguistic strategies such as euphemism may airbrush them out of view, but the realities remain. At the level of societal axiology, it would be necessary to de-naturalise these positions, and re-negotiate the whole issue of animal rights (Rachels 1990; Palmer 2008)[14].

The aim in this study has been to follow the lead of Stibbe (2018), in outlining a pathway of convergence between ecolinguistics and PDA. In the exploration of the underlying ideology of Chris Skinner, and also in those of listeners to the programme, attitudes that are genuinely ecosophical have been uncovered. It is not so much the fact that Skinner has an in-depth knowledge of wildlife – this is apparent from the denotational meanings of his words. On a deeper level analysis, a complex, multi-dimensional approach to ecology emerges, that is sensitive to animals as thinking beings, whose lives are granted an inherent meaning. The superficial anthropomorphism that he occasionally displays in representing their mental processes may at times disguise Skinner's real point, which is that animals and humans have much in common. Birds pair up, and raise families – just like humans – and enjoy moments like communal bathing, just as we do. As has been seen, he believes the meaning of birdsong goes beyond the widely accepted, "functional" interpretation, i.e. that birds emit largely meaningless sounds in order to attract mates, sound an alarm, or protect their territory. Instead, Skinner supports a more complex view of animal communication, such as that found in Ross's (2019) study of elephants, for example. For Skinner, birds communicate concepts to each other through song – somehow, put simply, they talk to each other.

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[14] There are some studies in ecolinguistics that promote the use of "positive" alternatives to hegemonic discourse. For instance, Dunayer (2001, in Stibbe 2018: 167), suggests we use the term "free-living nonhumans" in place of "wildlife", and aims to uncover linguistic patterns of exploitation through the adoption of terms like "food industry captive" and "cow enslaver", instead of "farm animal" and "dairy farmer", respectively.

Some of Skinner's implicit ideologies, we have seen, are shared by one of the listeners, and it also emerges from the analysis that Skinner is takes his audiences' deep interest in wildlife for granted. In terms of "being positive", then, there is much to take encouragement from in this programme. Apart from other factors, the environmental ideals it stands for clearly resonate sufficiently with its community of listeners for the BBC to assist in their dissemination.

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