



ECOLINGUISTIC FRAMING OF THE ANTHROPOCENE APOCALYPSE: AN ECO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN THE ROAD BY MCCARTHY

Shahzad linguisticskhan@gmail.com	PhD Scholar English (Linguistics), Southwest University Chongqing, China.
Alleli Faith P. Leyritana allelifaith.leyritana@deped.gov.ph	MA in Education, Department of Education, Republic of Philippines.
Muhammad Afzal mafzalmatvi@gmail.com	MS Scholar (English) University of Hertfordshire, England.
Laiba Shakeel laibashakil25@gmail.com	MS English)Linguistics(Bahria University Karachi campus, Pakistan.

Abstract

This study investigates the ecocritical and ecolinguistic framing of the Anthropocene apocalypse in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* by integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework. Using a qualitative interpretive research design, the study analyzes purposively selected textual passages having ecological devastation, environmental degradation, and interactions between humans and the natural world. The analysis is conducted across Fairclough's 3D model (1989) while employing Stibbe's (2015) concepts of framing, evaluation, salience, erasure, metaphor, identity, and "stories we live by" to analyze the ecological ideologies embedded within the narrative. The findings reveal that McCarthy constructs the post-apocalyptic landscape as a discourse of ecological exhaustion in which recurring representations of ash, silence, biodiversity loss, and environmental desolation challenge anthropocentric assumptions and expose the consequences of ecological exploitation. The novel systematically reframes the human-nature relationship by replacing narratives of human dominance and technological progress with an ecological worldview grounded in interdependence, vulnerability, and environmental responsibility. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that environmental collapse in *The Road* functions not merely as a fictional setting but as an ideological critique of unsustainable cultural narratives that characterize the Anthropocene. By integrating CDA with ecolinguistics, this research contributes to environmental literary discourse studies and ecolinguistic scholarship by offering a comprehensive analytical framework for examining ecological meanings in literary texts. The paper has international implications for it contributes to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals SDG-13 (Climate Action) a discourse on environmental consciousness and encourages readers to critically reconsider humans' relationship with the more-than-human world in the face of accelerating global ecological crises.

Keywords: *Anthropocene, Climate Fiction, Cormac McCarthy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Eco-criticism, Ecolinguistics, Ecological Framing, Environmental Discourse, The Road.*

Corresponding Author: Laiba Shakeel (MS English (Linguistics), Bahria University Karachi campus, Pakistan)

Email: laibashakil25@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The 21st century has seen a growing interest in the scientific community of the novel ecological risks of human activities, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, pollution, and the collapse of vast ecosystems. These interrelated crises have resulted in the term Anthropocene being coined, which designates a new geological era that witnesses human influence as the leading driver of the ecological systems of the Earth (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Steffen et al., 2015). The Anthropocene is a subject of contention among geologists, but has become very prominent in the humanities and social sciences, as it problematizes traditional views on the interaction of people and nature. In contrast to seeing humans as separate from nature, Anthropocene scholarships focuses on the intertwined nature of humans and planetary ecosystems, and the ethical implications of the human domination of nature (Clark, 2017; Haraway, 2016).

In literary research, post-apocalyptic fiction has become a force to explore issues of environmental disaster and the effects of ecological destruction. They not only envision dystopic futures, but also pose questions to the ideology that has normalized environmental exploitation and anthropocentric worldviews. Cormac McCarthy's contemporary post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* (2006) stands out as a notable example in this genre, given its depiction of a ravaged world where ecological and moral demise are inextricably linked. The novel follows an unnamed father and son through a world devoid of biodiversity, vegetation and wildlife, as well as any social structure, everything having been covered in ash. McCarthy does not simply make the apocalypse a tragedy of lost lives and livelihoods, but also one of nature's inextricable links to human life; the impact of environmental degradation on human life and ecological survival (De Bruyn, 2010; Chen, 2021).

The Road has been recently read from multiple literary criticism perspectives, such as ecocritical and Anthropocene, focused on the de-anthropocentric criticism, technology modernity, environmental irresponsibility. For example, Chen (2021) states that the novel is an exploration of the rejection of technological escape and extraterrestrial colonization and a call to responsible stewardship of the Earth. Likewise, De Bruyn (2010) reads the ravaged terrain as a kind of "ecological memory" mirroring human disruptions of nature. However, researchers have more recently studied McCarthy's anthropomorphic figure of

the earth as a grieving being, and the novel's ecological mourning draws attention to the emotional and ethical aspects of planetary collapse (Chen, 2025). Yet, these significant contributions have received comparatively little linguistic attention so far in the construction of ecological meanings and the human–nature relationship in the novel.

The interdisciplinary approach of ecolinguistics, which examines the role of language in influencing one's perception of the ecology, values of that ecology, and connection to the natural world, is one way to bridge this gap. Ecolinguistics is not about the neutral role of language as a method of communication, but rather the role of the "stories we live by" that either maintain or destroy ecological wellbeing (Stibbe, 2021). Therefore, discourse is a crucial factor in the production of environmental realities that rationalize specific ideologies about nature, growth, consumption, and human exceptionalism. Ecolinguistics aims, therefore, to seek out patterns in language that can contribute to ecological balance, with critical exposure to language constructions that support the exploitation of the environment (Fill & Penz, 2018; Stibbe, 2021).

In addition, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a second methodical approach to the language as a production of the ideology and power relations contained within texts, this time through the lens of Fairclough's (1995, 2013) three-dimensional model. CDA is not just a linguistic description, it also examines the discourse in relation to a wider social, political and ecological context. CDA is used to examine how narratives in literary texts normalise specific ideologies and challenge prevailing ideologies of "identity", "morality" and environmental "responsibility". The combination of CDA and ecolinguistics can, therefore, be used to carry out a full-scale examination of the ways in which literary texts represent ecological crises, are used to develop environmental ethics, and are engaged with to discuss the human responsibility in the Anthropocene.

The notion of framing, that is, the mental and linguistic systems by which people make sense of reality (Lakoff, 2010), is central to both Ecolinguistics and CDA. The way ecological crises are conceptualized can be as natural disasters, technological failures, moral consequences or opportunities for transformation, depending on the environmental frames. McNenny (2018) points out that the Anthropocene discourse is defined by competing frames that either reinforce the norm of ongoing human domination or evoke a sense of ecological responsibility and sustainability. These frames can be explored and studied within the contexts of literary narratives to reveal the ideology of the texts, which affects how the reader views environmental collapse and human agency.

In this theoretical context, the present study explores the ecolinguistic framing of the Anthropocene apocalypse in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. The study examines the use of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and contemporary ecolinguistic theory to examine the linguistic choices, metaphors, narrative descriptions, evaluative language, and ecological imagery used to create the relationship between humans and nature in the post-

apocalyptic landscape. In particular, it considers the role of discourse in representing environmental destruction, in challenging anthropocentric ideologies, and in creating alternative ecologies, involving a sense of interdependence, vulnerability and ethical responsibility to the more-than-human world.

This research brings together the fields of ecolinguistics, Anthropocene studies and Critical Discourse Analysis to add to the burgeoning field of environmental humanities and to move beyond the traditional ecocritical analysis of McCarthy's novel. It shows how literary discourse can not only mirror anxieties of the environment but can also be a catalyst in shaping environmental consciousness, by framing the Anthropocene as a discourse and material crisis. The study concludes that *The Road* is an ecolinguistic call to think again about the ethics of the human/nature relationship in a time of rapidly changing planetary conditions, and serves as an environmental cautionary tale about the sustainability of human practices.

2. Literature Review

This section comprehensively reviews literature on the topic touching upon ecolinguistic models, theoretical paradigms, in relation to environmental literary discourse that has been an active area of research in 21st century.

2.1. The Anthropocene and Environmental Discourse

The Anthropocene is one of the most important concepts of the modern environmental humanities and describes a period when human actions are impacting planetary systems on geological scales. It was first formulated in the field of earth sciences, but it has been subsequently broadened to literary studies, philosophy, discourse studies, and cultural criticism, as it redefines the interaction between human and nature (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Steffen et al., 2015). The Anthropocene scholarship focuses not on the external nature of environmental problems, but on the human responsibility, ecological interconnections, and moral issues arising from environmental degradation. Recent debates, however, have raised the question of whether Anthropocene stories are ideological, and, if so, how they problematize the nature of human agency in different ways, either affirming human exceptionalism or advocating a more ecological approach to humanity's responsibilities and humility.

Scholars like Haraway (2016) and Clark (2017) also extend the Anthropocene discourse by shifting the focus from anthropocentric approaches to thinking about humans as one species among many in the knitted-together networks of ecological systems. Consequently, literary narratives have become important sites for exploring ecological vulnerability, climate anxiety, and environmental ethics. In particular, modern post-apocalyptic literature presents a vision of the effects of environmental devastation and encourages readers to rethink the human environment.

2.2. "Ecolinguistics", Ecocritical Discourse

Ecolinguistics examines the interrelationship between language and ecological beliefs, values and practices. Ecolinguists, on the other hand, see language as a neutral communicative means rather than as a means that shapes “stories we live by” that do either advance ecological sustainability or legitimate environmental exploitation (Stibbe, 2021). Language shapes societies' perception of nature, their understanding of environmental crises and what is considered their accountability for environmental degradation.

Ecolinguistics goes beyond environmental words to the ideology of stories, metaphors, appraisal, framing, and representation (Fill & Penz 2018). Recent studies have shown that the field of ecolinguistics has grown increasingly interdisciplinary, and with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is now a field where scholars can explore how institutional and literary discourses are helping to normalize environmentally damaging practices or, on the contrary, promote ecological responsibility. In a recent bibliometric review for 2024, CDA is listed as one of the most influential methodological approaches in contemporary ecolinguistic research. Similarly, Laurie and Thompson (2024) show how fossil fuel reliance is fossilized in spite of climate crisis, via the use of ecolinguistic CDA. Similarly, Laurie and Thompson (2024) illustrate the fossilisation of fossil fuel reliance despite increasing climate crisis through the use of ecolinguistic CDA.

Given these developments, the study of literary texts which reflect ecological collapse, including texts embedded in anthropocene narratives, can be approached through the lens of "ecolinguistics. These developments imply that a study of literary texts that reflects ecological collapse, including texts that are part of anthropocene narratives, can be undertaken through the lens of "ecolinguistics".

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a study that analyzes language in terms of the reproduction of ideology, power, and social inequality (Fairclough, 1995, 2013). Fairclough's three dimensional frameworks describes discourse at three overlapping levels: the textual level, the discursive level and the sociocultural level. This approach allows researchers to analyze and study the linguistic patterns and also the ideology implicit in the representations of the texts.

In the field of environmental humanities, CDA has become more and more used to study ecological narratives, climate communication, and environmental politics. Environmental framing can be understood as the language and the way thinking is organized to interpret the ecological reality (Lakoff, 2010). The purpose of the different frames in constructing environmental crises as natural disasters, technological failures, political conflicts, or ethical outcomes of human action is to support the object's argument. The function of the different frames is to back up the object's argument; they build the environmental crises as natural disasters, technological failures, political conflicts, or ethical outcomes of human behavior. Thus, CDA together with ecolinguistics

can be used to uncover the linguistic construction of ecological identity, environmental values and human responsibility in literary texts.

Recent research has shown that climate change discourse often legitimises anthropocentric values and ideologies, whilst marginalising ecocentric values and visions. Combining ecolinguistics and CDA can thus help scholars to detect linguistic decisions that either affirm or dispute the dominant environmental storytelling.

2.3. Ecocritical Studies on The Road

The Road by Cormac McCarthy has been the subject of much ecocritical study, as it portrays an environment ravaged by catastrophe and human life struggling to survive in its wake. De Bruyn (2010) contends that the novel creates ecological memory through reoccurring visual representations of destroyed landscapes, highlighting the close connection between environmental decay and human suffering. Likewise, Chen (2021) reads the novel as a condemnation of techno-utopian fantasy and anthropocentric assumptions, and suggests that McCarthy calls for ecological responsibility instead of technological flight.

These interpretations have been extended in recent scholarship. As readers we might be taken aback by this idea of climate trauma and future-oriented ecological anxieties, which is the subject of MüllerMcCall's (2023) treatment of The Road. The entire story is a product of "ecoprecarity," as Bharathy (2024) defined it, the extreme vulnerability of humans in an environment that has been destroyed, leading to social collapse and existential insecurity. In the meantime, however, Chen (2025) suggests that McCarthy personifies the planet itself, rendering ecological grief as a way of articulating the emotional impact of earth's destruction.

While these studies make important contributions to ecocritical understandings of The Road, the emphasis in these studies is on theme rather than discourse analysis. Few studies have examined the novel systematically concerning the linguistic choices, framing of the narratives, lexical patterns, metaphors and evaluative language that shape the novel's ecological meanings. Furthermore, the application of ecolinguistics to Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is not well developed in the McCarthy scholarship.

2.4. Research Gap

The Road has been successfully introduced as an important Anthropocene story of ecological collapse, environmental grieving, and human fragility by existing scholarship. Nonetheless, these previous studies have mostly been conducted based on the perspective of ecocritical, philosophical or environmental humanities. Discourse as a linguistic framing that produces ecological ideologies has been barely analyzed by few researchers. In addition, the intersection of Stibbe's ecolinguistic approach with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has not been fully utilized in analysis of The Road's human–nature relationship. The present study attempts to fill this void by investigating the linguistic

strategies of McCarthy, his apocalyptic narrative of the Anthropocene, his critique of anthropocentrism, and his ecological ethics that are discursively created.

3. Methodology

The research design used in this study is an ecolinguistic research through a qualitative interpretive method, which deals with the relationship between the human and nature in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and the ecolinguistic framework of apocalypse concerning the Anthropocene. This study adopts an integrated analytical framework based on the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough (1995, 2013), which is fitting for the study of the ideological, linguistic and ecological meanings contained in literary discourse, as well as the ecolinguistic framework developed by Stibbe (2021). The main data are purposively selected extracts from the text of *The Road* that portray environmental destruction, ecological imagery, human–nature relationships, survival stories and moral consideration about ecological collapse. The analysis is presented in three stages: Textual level – lexical choice, metaphors, transitivity, modality, evaluation and other language features that create ecological meanings; Discursive practice level – how the language features are used to create narrative perspectives, positioning readers, and representations of environmental crisis; Social practice level – how the findings can be discussed in the wider socio-ecological context of the Anthropocene, touching upon the ideologies of anthropocentrism, environmental responsibility and ecological ethics. The concepts of ecolinguistics that Stibbe (2021) has developed are used throughout the analysis to bring to the fore both narratives and the dominant worldviews they challenge or reinforce. They are analysed using textual analysis and all claims are substantiated with evidence drawn from the novel itself and given a context within the current scholarship on the Anthropocene, environmental humanities and ecolinguistics. In this integrated methodological approach, the apocalypse is analysed not just as a physical catastrophe but as an ideology contestation of the divided relationship between humans and nature, as described by McCarthy.

4. Analysis and Discussion

McCarthy's *The Road* presents the apocalypse of the Anthropocene as a discourse of ecological erasure, an apocalypse in which the collapse of the environment is not a sudden catastrophe but the permanent disappearance of ecological processes that once sustained human and non-human lives. Nature appears as a burnt-out environment, instead of a renewable one, as suggested by the constant presence of ash, silence, dead plants, broken structures and empty landscapes in the novel. This discourse is an example of Stibbe's (2021) "stories we live by" that are destructive as they normalize ecological destruction while simultaneously revealing its effects. Rather than depicting the apocalypse through spectacular violence alone, McCarthy emphasizes the gradual

disappearance of ecological vitality, inviting readers to recognize environmental degradation as the inevitable outcome of unsustainable human practices.

A representative quote reads, "The landscape is now overrun with ash, debris and silence; the natural order does not exist here."

4.1. Textual Analysis: Fairclough

In terms of the word choice, McCarthy's text is overwhelmingly linked with the semantic fields of death, decay and absence. During the descriptions of the landscape, words like ash, ruin, wreckage, cold, silence, debris repeat, forming a lexical pattern that takes away the traditional association of nature with fertility, growth and renewal. The continuous presence of the nominal expression instead of an active verb, helps to create a static description of the environment, indicating ecological paralysis instead of nature's transformation. Nature is not a living ecological agent anymore, but rather an objectified "remnant" of planetary collapse.

The writer uses cumulative imagery, too. Rather than viewing environmental damage as an isolated incident, the continuous reports of broken bridges, dead forests, deserted villages, contaminated rivers, and ash-covered roads converge into a unified text of irreversible damage. This is an aggravation of the sense that ecological degradation has become the predominant fact of life in the Anthropocene.

In an ecolinguistic sense, these patterns of words make environmental loss more salient. According to Stibbe (2021), discourse focuses on specific realities, it shades out other realities. The destruction of the environment is striking in *The Road*, with descriptions of the environment repeated many times, and the healing of the environment is almost entirely absent.

4.2. Discursive Practice

The discursive level repeats the positioning of the reader as a witness not as an outsider to the narrative. Environmental descriptions are filtered - through the experiences of father and son, who rely totally on increasingly scant natural resources for survival. Ecological collapse is therefore not just scenery, but the condition from which all human actions spring.

This interminable road motif is not only a way of physically moving from one place to another, it is also a metaphor for the human race's ongoing quest to reach a level of ecological security in a world that has lost stability. Each of those deserted towns and burnt forests, each failed bridge and spoiled water source reaffirms the lesson that civilization is not possible without functional ecosystems.

McCarthy deliberately omits any succinct explanation of the apocalypse. This narrative approach expands the range of interpretation in the work and enables readers to relate the fictional disaster to the issues of climate change, nuclear destruction, biodiversity loss, pollution and resource depletion that are topical today. This blurriness enhances the

Anthropocene frame since ecological disaster does not seem to be just one event anymore, but the result of various types of environmental exploitation.

4.3. Social Practice

The voice of the discourse is part of the social dimension in the context of Fairclough and is embedded in the broader ideology of the Anthropocene. The scene is a landscape that has been ravaged by human activity, reflecting the impact of anthropocentric ideologies that have traditionally viewed nature as an infinite source of resources to be exploited.

The loss of forests, rivers, wildlife, and agricultural systems is proof of the fact that destruction of the environment will ultimately destroy human society. McCarthy thus turns the traditional anthropocentric perspectives upside down: instead of man dominating nature, man's life is reliant on ecological conditions which are not under his control.

The discourse resonates with theories of Anthropocene scholarship (Clark, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Steffen et al., 2015), which state that humans are now geological agents that alter planetary systems and are also subject to ecological responses.

In this presentation, we will explore the possibilities for X Ecolinguistic Interpretation of *The Road* according to Stibbe's (2021) framework.

4.4. Framing

One of the most important discoveries from *The Road* in an ecolinguistic sense is how language is used to construct a post apocalyptic world as one that is ecologically exhausted. As Stibbe (2021) states, framing is the cognitive structures formed by means of language that shape the way readers think about the ecological reality. In all of this, nature is never a nurturing presence nor an antagonist, but always described as a lifeless and depleted ecology whose powers of regeneration have been irretrievably lost. The environment is described over and over again, as ash-covered landscapes, dead forests, abandoned fields, polluted rivers and an ever-darkened sky become the dominant frame of ecological finality. This constant imagery moves readers' perspective away from the traditional literary image of nature as beautiful, abundant and renewing to a vision of environmental failure and collapse where ecological systems are no longer functioning.

The idea of nature being "worn out" instead of "damaged" has far-reaching ideological connotations. McCarthy doesn't see environmental ruin as a temporary blip that will be righted and nature will heal; he makes it the sure result of the long-term abuse of the planet by men. This is a challenge to anthropocentric beliefs that natural systems can be resilient for an unlimited period and are designed exclusively for human needs. Throughout the narrative there is no ecological recovery, indicating that the degradation is passed a point of no ecological return. This, in turn, makes readers think critically about the prevailing narratives in the dominant culture that promote industrial growth, over-extraction, and technologic hope. According to Stibbe, McCarthy's work is more about an

alarming story than a destructive one: It is about limits on the planet, fragility of the ecosystem, and the need for human existence to rely on a healthy ecosystem. The ecological frame, built throughout the novel, thus serves as a literary device and ideological critique of the environmental practices of the Anthropocene.

4.5. Evaluation

Evaluation is another main part of the ecolinguistic model proposed by Stibbe that describes the linguistic options used to convey attitudes towards the entities and relations of ecology. In the entire course of *The Road*, the evaluative language that describes the environment is almost exclusively negative, indicating ecological decay, not ecological production. Life and rebirth are associated with forests, rivers, mountains, fields, wildlife, etc., and conventional images of the environment are consistently measured by lexical items that represent decay, emptiness, sterility, coldness and death. These assessments impose an environment where the natural world is no longer a source of sustenance, shelter, and continuity; rather it is a source of vulnerability, fatigue and permanent devastation.

This pattern of evaluation makes a huge impact on readers' sense of ecology. In contrast to the idea of 'wilderness as a pristine sanctuary', McCarthy highlights the fragility of the environment where catastrophic environmental damage has occurred. Rivers are unable to support aquatic life, forests have lost their biodiversity and functions as a protector, agricultural space is unable to support human civilization or other species. The novel challenges fundamental ideas such as the notion that ecosystems will keep operating in the absence of human activity through this continuous negative assessment. Rather, environmental value is created in the context of recognition of ecological dependence and mutual vulnerability.

In addition, the evaluative discourse is not limited to physical landscapes, but also includes moral and ethical. The concept of "survival" is devaluated when it is achieved through exploitation, violence, or ecological neglect, and compassion, restraint, and responsibility are implicitly linked to the concept of ecological sustainability. McCarthy thus makes nature a moral issue, implying that harm to nature is harm to human beings. The interwoven system of assessment in this book further solidifies Stibbe's thesis that discourse creates ecological realities, as well as ethical worldviews, and prompts readers to approach the assumptions of today's human/nature relationships with a new perspective.

4.6. Salience

Stibbe (2021) states that salience relates to language features that help to guide the reader's focus on certain aspects of the ecological situation and obscure others. *The Road* repeatedly brings up environmental destruction by using very salient environmental images, so that the reader could never forget what environmental collapse entails. Of these recurring images, ash is the most prevalent ecological symbol. It is found in almost all the

story, in the road, in the building, in the forest, in the river, in the mountain and even in the human body! Ash is not just a descriptive backdrop, but a constant reminder of environmental destruction, visually tying together all elements of the post-apocalyptic landscape in one discourse of ecological destruction.

The significance of ash is extraordinary in many symbolic ways. On the material level, it means the degradation of vegetation and biodiversity, and ultimately the loss of civilization. It is a symbol for the remnants of processes on Earth that have supported life. Each reoccurrence reaffirms the notion that the living world is now made of lifeless pieces of dead matter. This image is repeated many times throughout the novel, which is why the reader never gets a chance to separate himself/herself from the environmental crisis, but instead becomes part of the crisis—environmental destruction is the condition of being alive.

Ash, silence, darkness, emptiness – McCarthy pays attention to these, too. These consistent circumstances in the environment continuously remind the readers of the loss and not the gains. No birdsong, seasonal change, flowering plants or animal activity makes the ecological damage caused by environmental collapse stand out. Salient is not just repetition, it is also a perpetual memory vs. absence. This discourse thus draws readers' attention from human-as-survivor stories to a much wider issues of planet sustainability and ecological resiliency.

4.7. Erasure

The erasure of ecological entities and relations, namely systematic omission and marginalization of essential ecological beings and relations that are key to sustaining life, perhaps most impressively, is one of the eco-linguistic strategies used in *The Road* (Stibbe 2021). The novel is a world where biodiversity is almost completely gone, and McCarthy builds this world throughout the novel. Animals are rarely seen, birds are gone and the forests are no longer alive; farming activity is no longer possible and the seasons are no longer ecologically significant. By being absent, this presence is a strong form of discourse of ecological erasure, pointing to the catastrophic consequences of environmental destruction.

While in many literary works nature is an active, living part of mankind's experience, *The Road* makes an effort to remove the complexity of nature from the story. The non-human life itself is not treated as incidental to the story, but one of the novel's most profound ideological statements. Gradual awareness of the reader that the real loss of mankind is not only technological civilization, but the breakdown of the ecological relationship that made it possible in the first place. Birds have no voices, there is no wildlife, and the fertile lands are gone – nature's destruction is not just a matter of human pain.

Notably, the erasure paradoxically enhances ecological consciousness through McCarthy's use. The story is about what is missing, not what might have been present, and prompts readers to imagine the richness of ecosystems that are no longer there. This loss creates a stronger sense of appreciation for biodiversity and ecological dependence, and a stronger rhetorical device of loss. As Stibbe would argue, these kinds of discourses reveal negative cultural stories that make nature invisible until it is too late. The Road, then, turns out to be a work of anthropocentric erasure overturned – it makes the reader consider the ecology that societies nowadays tend to overlook.

4.8. Metaphor

Another key aspect of McCarthy's ecolinguistic discourse is metaphor. Stibbe (2021) asserts that metaphors have an impact on ecological thinking because they affect how people think about the relationship between people and environment. In *The Road*, the environment is not only a physical reality, but also a symbol of larger environmental and ethical issues.

The road itself is the novel's main metaphor. It means more than the physical mobility of humans; it is a metaphor for the uncertain trajectory of humanity in the Anthropocene, in which only those who can map their way through a new ecology can survive. The road flows through uncertainty, vulnerability and the lack of ecological futures; it is not the path to progress, or the path to civilization. Ash is another metaphor for ecological memory as well. It represents old forests, wildlife, cities, and civilizations, and it's a reminder of the tragedy of man's ecological deeds.

The metaphor here is the disappearance of ecological interaction, as manifested in the absence of sound. As long as it is healthy, sound represents life and environmental vitality. McCarthy's deafness thus represents ecological death, where the interdependencies that sustain life have been disrupted. Darkness is also a metaphor for moral ambiguity, ecological doubt and the breakdown of faith in technological progress.

Together these metaphors produce an overarching ecological perspective, one of physical, psychological, ethical, and cultural collapse. In place of the abstract arguments for the environment, McCarthy conveys the fragility of the environment through recurring symbolic frames that remold the reader's perception of humanity and of nature.

4.9. Stories We Live By

The idea of "stories we live by" is also the intellectual basis for Stibbe's ecolinguistic theory and is perhaps the best lens to view *The Road* through. Stibbe (2021) argues that societies are shaped by hegemonic narratives, which have a central place in their comprehension of the world and thus affect values, behaviours and relations with the world. Many modern societies still function along the lines of stories that focus on endless economic growth, technological control, consumerism and human superiority to nature.

Such stories enable the exploitation of the environment by representing ecological systems as infinite resources to be used by humans.

Throughout *The Road*, McCarthy methodically debunks these prevailing narratives. The post-apocalyptic nature of the setting showcases the extreme implications of seeing nature only from the anthropocentric and utilitarian point of view. The answer to technological progress is technology; economic systems are falling apart; and human civilization is irretrievably lost in the midst of ecological disaster. The loss of ecological stability showcases the failures of stories built on the assumptions of endless progress and ecological domination.

Instead of these damaging narratives, McCarthy builds another ecological narrative based in vulnerability, interdependence, and ethical accountability. One of the most important examples is the father/son relationship and the other environment in which they live: survival is not dependent on the overcoming of nature but on the awareness of the person's integration in an ecological system. Care, restraint, compassion and environmental awareness are the only possible answers to planetary collapse. Thus, *The Road* can be seen as an ecolinguistic cure: a call for readers to overcome anthropocentric paradigms and embrace new narratives about the living environments that embody sustainability, coexistence, and a respect for the more-than-human world.

The novel is a post-apocalyptic story, but from Stibbe's perspective, that is only a small part of the picture. It is an effective ecological narrative that challenges destructive cultural narratives and envisions a different ethic for humans and nature. McCarthy weaves ecological tragedy into a narrative that readers learn from, in order to call into question the unsustainable perspectives that still drive the Anthropocene.

5. Discussion

The results show that McCarthy's apocalypse is built around an ecological mode of discourse as much as an action mode of catastrophe. As in recent ecolinguistic research (Fill & Penz, 2018; Stibbe, 2021), environmental meaning is not built from single instances of descriptions, but rather from recurring linguistic patterns. The lexical dominance of decay, silence and ash creates a discourse where "environmental collapse" becomes the main organizing principle of "reality".

The findings also validate De Bruyn's (2010) claim that *The Road* is an ecological memory of environmental destruction, while building upon the existing literature by revealing how environmental destruction is linguistically remembered through discourse. Similarly, the present analysis supports Chen's (2021) reading of the novel as an attack on anthropocentrism by showing that ecological meanings are not only produced through the thematic content of the narrative, but also, and more importantly, through framing, evaluation, salience, and erasure.

From Fairclough's perspective of CDA, the novel exposes the process by which 'ecological consequences' resulting from the unsustainable human practices become 'naturalised' in the discourse. At the same time, the eco-linguistic approach of Stibbe uncovers the competing environmental discourses in the text, demonstrating that McCarthy's post-apocalyptic setting is not just a fictional world but a critique on the way humans relate to the more-than-human world in a divided manner. The Anthropocene apocalypse thus becomes a material catastrophe and a discursive warning, urging readers to reconsider the ethical and environmental responsibilities in the face of ecological history that might yet be written.

6. Conclusion

The current study examined the anthropocene apocalypse's representation in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* from a critical discourse analytical perspective of three-dimensional analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2013) and the framework of ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2021). The results show how McCarthy not only creates a catastrophic setting for the survival of humanity but also a strong ecological discourse which challenges anthropocentric ideologies and sheds light on the effects of humanity's exploiting relationship with the natural world. The novel uses recurring linguistic features, such as 'death' or 'decay' related vocabulary, 'ashes' and 'silence' metaphors, evaluative language and the systematic loss of biodiversity to make the Anthropocene an irreversible ecological crisis, in which environmental devastation inevitably results in moral, social and existential collapse. Fairclough also shows that these textual decisions are situated within a more pervasive discursive and sociocultural frame of reference that introduces a critique on the dominant discourses of human superiority and technological improvement and unlimited economic growth. At the same time, Stibbe's ideas on framing, evaluating, salience, erasure, metaphor, and 'stories we live by' throw light on the ways in which readers' ecological consciousness is being reconstructed by McCarthy, who is replacing the destructive anthropocentric 'stories' with an alternative ecological 'worldview' based on interdependence, vulnerability, and environmental responsibility.

The study also makes a theoretical contribution by showing that Critical Discourse Analysis and ecolinguistics as complementary analytical tools are compatible in the analysis of literary discourse. Fairclough's model is useful for understanding the way that linguistic structures reproduce ideology and power relations, whereas Stibbe's can be used to show how these ideologies influence ecological perceptions and environmental ethics. Their integration is a holistic methodology for analysing literary depictions of ecological crises in the Anthropocene. Furthermore, this study builds on previous studies of *The Road* that have interpreted its environment as a kind of theme, demonstrating that environmental meanings are produced through discourse not only as themes. In sum, the novel can be read as an ecological warning that invites readers to think differently about how we interact

with the "more-than-human world" and how environmental sustainability cannot be divorced from human life. As the world becomes more climate-changing, nature-losing, and ecologically unstable, McCarthy's story is a timely reminder that the future of civilization hangs on shifting anthropocentric thinking patterns to ecological and sustainable ones.

7. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations for future research and interdisciplinary scholarship can be suggested. Second, future research should expand on the use of Critical Discourse Analysis and ecolinguistics in other post-apocalyptic, climate, and speculative fiction texts to compare how other authors linguistically create ecological crises and human–nature relationships in various cultural contexts. Consider comparative studies with Atwood, Octavia Butler, J. G. Ballard, and Emily St. John Mandel, among others, to gain deeper insights into the nature of changing ecological stories in the modern novel. Second, researchers are invited to apply other discourse analytical lenses that have not yet been used for the investigation of ecological framing, such as corpus-assisted discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, multimodal discourse analysis, and narrative theory, to approach the topic from different perspectives. These place interdisciplinary approaches to bolstering the understanding of the relationship between linguistic and narrative strategies and environmental consciousness.

Moreover, the pedagogical implications of ecolinguistic literary analysis should be studied by incorporating environmentally related literary texts for the use of language and literature learners. The integration of this can help raise awareness and ecological literacy among students, promote critical thinking and ethics on environment and exploitation, and make students aware of the ideological aspect of environmental communication. Readers' responses to ecological narratives could also be explored in the future to assess how literary discourse can affect behaviour regarding sustainability and environmental responsibility. Last, but not least, ecolinguistics could be applied to the design of educational content and environmental communication campaigns to create a human–nature discourse that doesn't emphasize unlimited exploitation and environmental domination, but coexistence and ecological justice. These ongoing scientific and educational contributions can not only represent ecological crises but also become agents of change for constructing environmentally responsible societies in the Anthropocene.

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