

# Greenspeak: A study of environmental discourse

Sage Publications: London

1998

0-7619-1705-5 (pb); 0-7619-1704-7 (hb)

£17.99 (pb); £40.00 (hb)

204 + xi

[Order this book](#)

This book explores how language is used for talking about environmental issues (the language of ecology) and also suggests that the continued well being of human languages is dependent on ecological factors (the ecology of language). It is an explicit attempt to demonstrate the relevance and potential interest of environmental ideas and questions for linguists.

The book begins by reviewing alternative theories of language and emphasises the authors' conviction that language is the most significant tool in human 'meaning-making'. Attention to 'Greenspeak' is important given that it is through language that we understand our environment and discuss and negotiate environmental issues. The resources available in English to talk about the environment are considered with the authors concluding that our environmental vocabulary is impoverished and the grammatical structures of our language obstruct some potentially useful discursive developments. This has the effect of rendering much environmental debate uninformed and unhelpful. The rhetorical use of science in Greenspeak is then outlined before the book moves on to analyse the narrative structures typically found, the ways in which metaphors are employed and the expression of time in environmental discourse.

The book then changes tack somewhat to focus upon 'the ecology of language'. This section emphasises the need to preserve languages as potential resources of new metaphors, knowledge and perspectives and draws attention to the conditions which languages need in order to survive. An interesting relationship is outlined between the loss of biological diversity and the loss of linguistic diversity. The two often go together as indigenous knowledge and languages are lost along with local biodiversity as a result of 'development'. The authors illustrate this point with the example of a logging programme in Papua New Guinea which has led to the disappearance of species of plants and at the same time threatened the rich local knowledge of the habitat through the importing of foodstuffs and the emphasis on the acquisition of non-traditional knowledge in government schools. While the authors caution against the selective ransacking of insights from other languages as a form of cultural imperialism, they conclude that more reliable environmental knowledge could be generated by pooling the insights generated by different languages.

There are a number of aspects of the book which I found frustrating. My main complaint is that there much relevant work which is never mentioned. For example, within the sociology of the environment there are a number of studies which explore environmental dialogue and discourse, the social construction of the environment and nature, and the need for multiple environmental perspectives. The authors may well be breaking new ground within linguistics but there is much here that is not novel for sociologists. One of my other problems with the book relates to the fact that its primary intended audience is clearly linguists. There are sections which are difficult to understand if you are not fluent in linguist-speak. My other frustration was methodological. While the book presents itself as a grounded analysis of examples of 'Greenspeak' (with the authors outlining the texts which they have considered as data at the start) much of the analysis is at a somewhat general level and does not present enough of the texts in question to make the analysis transparent.

That said there is much that is engaging and thought provoking within this book. It will be particularly useful for sociologists interested in the discursive and social construction of environmental issues.

**Kate Burningham**

University of Surrey

[Copyright Sociological Research Online.](#)

Greenspeak. a study of environmental discourse. by Rom Harré, Rom Harré©, Jens Brockmeier, Peter Mulhauser. 0 Ratings. 0 Want to read. 0 Currently reading. 0 Have read. This edition published in 1999 by Sage Publications in Thousand Oaks, Calif. Written in English. 204 pages. Availability. 1. Greenspeak: a study of environmental discourse. 1999, Sage Publications. in English. aaaa. Not in Library. Download for print-disabled. 2. Greenspeak: A Study of Environmental Discourse. November 3, 1998, Sage Publications, Inc. Environmental Assessment of Estuarine Ecosystems: A Case Study (Environmental and Ecological Risk Assessment). Read more. Discourse: A Critical Introduction. Read more. Arab News and Conflict: A multidisciplinary discourse study (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture). Read more. A Lover's Discourse: Fragments. That the study of Greenspeak has come a long way can be seen from the publication in German of a first introductory textbook on ecological Linguistics (Trampe, 1990) followed by Hill (1993), the Conference on the Discourse of Environmental Advocacy held in Salt Lake City in 1992, the setting up of the Language and Ecology group at Lancaster University in 1993, and the International Symposium on Language and Ecology held at Klagenfurt University in 1995. This reflects a growing realization by students of environmental studies that a many-faceted investigation of

language is a ecolinguistics, ethnography of communication, environmental metaphor, biocultural diversity, greenspeak. Abstract. Discourses about the contemporary environment, and the economic and political processes that impact upon it, are by no means of concern solely to environmental anthropologists. Such is the reach and depth of disquiet and anxiety about the environmental future in both Northern and Southern hemispheres; it. In a study of "naturalness" as it is applied to Australian ecosystems, Taylor (1990) concludes that "failure to recognize that naturalness is a culturally constructed concept, rather than a universal one, has produced. ambiguity in the terminology used for these assessments" (p. 411).