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Conclusion

A Closing and an Opening for Action-Taking through Communication

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The contributions to this volume create a rich tapestry of complementary threads and themes; they offer theoretical and applied advances to conceptualise, through verbal and non-verbal communication, values, beliefs and actions about and for the lifescape(s).¹

The volume opens with two context-setting contributions which anticipate themes, approaches and suggestions offered in Parts II and III, respectively. The reflection by Alwin Frank Fill on the concept of ‘tension’ in verbal and non-verbal communication offers insights into the potential and drawbacks of this complex notion that can also be interpreted as a metaphor for our times. The instability of tension, Fill argues, can result in devastating consequences (such as environmental degradation and wars) as well as in renewing relations and connections between humans and the con-vironment. Fill’s chapter also introduces the relevance of reaching out beyond verbal communication, which will be investigated in Part II.

Instability, in the sense of diachronic change, is the focus of Robert Poole’s contribution. Through corpus-assisted discourse analysis, Poole offers clear evidence of diachronic development in language usage regarding climate factors, issues or weather events. This powerful and evidence-based methodology to identify discursive trends which instantiate our relationship with ecosystems can be used for citizen advocacy, policymaking and education, among other areas. Poole’s contribution also introduces the main theme of Part III: corpus-assisted eco-pedagogy can offer a learner-centred, discovery-based methodology for language study in relation to how we conceptualise the con-vironment. We believe that the knowledge and involvement derived from eco-pedagogy supports not only language education and awareness but also citizen education and social action.

Part II opens up to multimodal discourse and moves towards different strands of what we call ecomultimodality. Investigating a variety of text typologies and practices, the studies in Part II show the potential of multimodal studies to identify ensembles of verbal and non-verbal interactions, conventions and repertoires which orchestrate communication instantiating lifescapes. M. Cristina Caimotto demonstrates how communicative practices based on 'automatality' tend to be normalised and virtually go unquestioned. On the other hand, she analyses multimodal texts promoting sustainable mobility (as an alternative to 'fossil lifestyle') and draws the conclusion that these texts would benefit from being better aligned with deep principles of positive change and eco-sustainable citizen life. Elisabetta Zurru also reflects on how positive change can be actively promoted (or potentially prevented) by verbal, visual and multimodal metaphors used for representing the impending situation of the global climate crisis in its urgency. The 'ticking clock' can become an inescapable doomsday scenario contributing to paralysing hopelessness or be refrained to support and sustain a positive call to action. Time is also an underlying theme in Emilio Amideo's study: in discussing the complex clusters of interrelated and overlapping texts in one of Kara Walker's art installation, the author cogently demonstrates how art works can intersect our lives interacting with our bodies and actions. While the installation is made to melt and, in time, disappear, it contributes to individual and collective 'social-ecological memory' of a hegemonic colonial past which is still evident in the exploitative mindset towards the 'other' (human and more-than-human).

The last two contributions of Part II foreground the more-than-human. Gavin Lamb's work investigates the concept of 'hospitality' in multispecies encounters showing how conservation discourses become ineffective due to an unequal power relation between species (in this case the encounter between pinnipeds and humans). Media and social media coverage gives evidence of the problematic (and ultimately lethal) conceptualisation of 'hospitality'. Maria Bortoluzzi expands multispecies to encompass plants and explores the representation of plant identity as instantiated in institutional and promotional texts advocating for the protection of plants and ecosystems. Identity categorization is discussed and problematised due to the radical change in perspective offered by plants in relation with lifescapes.

In the contributions of Part III, research meets educational advances through ecoliteracy as enhanced by linguistic and multimodal education addressed to different communities of learners. In the chapter introducing the section, Andrea Sabine Sedlaczek complements Peirce's semiotic theory with

ecolinguistics and multimodal studies. Thus, she proposes a flexible and holistic framework of analysis to promote and enhance ecoliteracy practices addressed to (young) adult learners. In the following chapter, Elisa Bertoldi focuses on university students who will become teachers of young learners. The study investigates the multimodal interaction of student teachers as storytellers and groups of children during picturebook narration in English as L2. The purpose of the events is involving children in econarratives that give salience to beliefs and practices respectful of the environment. Grit Alter's chapter investigates SCUBA diving communication conventions as representative of the extreme fragility of humans in underwater conditions; this is complemented by the analysis of a children picturebook about ocean studies to raise awareness on the delicate and endangered balance of the ocean ecosystems. The study is a reflection on complementarity of ecoliteracy for adults and children. In the last chapter of the volume, Sole Alba Zollo uses the analysis of promotional strategies in EU resources for young adult learners to engage university students in a learning-by-doing educational task: planning eco-sustainable initiatives for a local community of their choice and writing promotional multimodal texts to inform and involve citizens. Ecoliteracy is carried out through student-centred learning by design.

The tapestry of the volume has been collectively woven in its threads, colours, patterns and materials; its stories have been told. As the contributors were developing them, in their different theoretical and applied areas, other questions surfaced, new issues appeared and unexpected perspectives opened. Ecolinguistics, ecoliteracy and ecomultimodality are areas that live and thrive interdisciplinarily and transdisciplinarily and can expand in multiple research directions. To remain within the scope of this volume, we believe that multimodal studies (in their different strands) have a lot to contribute to ecological communication towards what we call ecomultimodality, namely multimodal studies with a caring view and ethically informed attitude towards the lifescape and climate justice. A great number of multimodal studies have done that already, and several ecolinguistics studies have also dealt with multimodal aspects. We believe in the potential of these fast-expanding research areas, which will offer precious insights for positive ecological communication and action.

Similarly, we think that ecoliteracy can profit from being informed by studies about language and other semiotic systems. This is not a novel concept, since some scholars have already expanded ecoliteracy through ecolinguistics (or other strands of discourse studies); however, we need to underline the extraordinary potential of this complementarity. We also think that ecoliteracy would profit

from cross-fertilising with multiliteracies studies which include reflections on a variety of semiotic practices and affordances.

Contributors have underlined the well-known limits of verbal and semiotic methodologies based on human language, body and perception to describe what is other-than-us (their *Umwelt*), and we can hardly imagine. Research needs to adopt and develop innovative methodologies, inevitably human, but also more flexible, inclusive of and reaching out to the more-than-us in the web of life.

We would like to end by mentioning fundamental human voices who have not been included in the volume, even though some contributions evoked them. Their resilient existence shows that humans are able to establish deep contact with the con-vironment and lifescapes. On the one hand, literary and creative works of art allow us to explore the limits of human language and its anthropocentrism and give us insights into what is 'beyond' human limitations. On the other, we want to mention the voices of the native peoples whose cultures are still able to narrate the lifescapes, including humans, rather than depicting their human exceptionalism. These peoples and their more-than-human surroundings are among the most affected by the current climate imbalance and lack of global climate justice. Their stories and voices are the way forward to mediate the lifescape, and learn it again.

Note

- 1 This contribution was jointly written and edited by both authors.