

## **Ecolinguistics, Semantics and Pragmatics – Two Case Studies: The *Hit Chaurasi Pad* and Norfolk Island, South Pacific**

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### **Abstract**

Ecolinguistics or the scientific study of language ecologies and the interaction between language and the environment began as a subdiscipline of applied linguistics in Western universities in the late 1970s. It is primarily concerned with:

- How the contours of the natural environment match linguistic contours in respective milieus and vice versa – the ecology of language, and
- Environmental discourse analysis – the language of ecology.

Despite several seminal works and although much has been written in various volumes covering the theory and epistemology of ecolinguistics, the field still awaits further theoretical expansion and synthesis within itself and together with other fields of enquiry. The multidisciplinary focus of ecolinguistics requires that ecolinguists take a holistic approach embracing a multitude of perspectives both Eastern and Western. It is proposed here that the discipline should strive ahead utilising modern linguistic and environmental theories and technologies while maintaining the validity of ancient basics and practical measures that are the foundation of the area of enquiry.

This paper proposes a synthesis of ecolinguistics with:

- 1) An Indian approach to the treatment of language and environment, i.e. the semantic aspect, and
- 2) The case study of language evolution and change on Norfolk Island, South Pacific, i.e. an example of communicative adaptation – the pragmatic aspect.

It employs two facets for analysis:

- 1) The *Hit Chaurasi Pad (Eighty-four Stanzas)* of medieval Indian poet Hit Hari Vansh Goswami for its linguistic descriptive power and artistic depiction of humans interacting with Nature in a divine way, and
- 2) Place names on Norfolk Island in the Norfolk language for their practical, historical and environmental implications and significance.

These two case studies aim at finding some suggestions to advancing current thought and theory in ecolinguistics through:

- 1) Considering the importance of Indian/Eastern aspects of human-environment interaction; and
- 2) Suggesting the advantage of doing ecolinguistics and placename study on small island environments to hint at various universals and commonalities in linguistic and ecological contact.

### **1 Introduction**

The relatively new and multifaceted discipline of ecolinguistics, environmental linguistics or language ecology has been explicated in various volumes (Harré et al. 1999; Fill 1996) and recently from a dialectical perspective (Bang & Døør 2007). The field of enquiry can be broadly divided into two parts:

1. The scientific study of how the contours of language match the contours of the natural environment, and

2. Environmental discourse analysis.

These two aspects have been presented in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), further developed by Mühlhäusler (2003) in the first coursebook in ecolinguistics and from a critical discourse perspective by Alexander (2009). Apart from an apparent increased interest in studying the relationships between language and environment with the appearance of the online journal *Language & Ecology* ([www.ecoling.net/journal.html](http://www.ecoling.net/journal.html)) and a wikipedia.org site for ecolinguistics ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecolinguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecolinguistics)), there has not been the warranted theoretical push to solidify the discipline on the international linguistic and environmental stage. This was noticeable in Germany last year at the 15th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA) where only around 20 linguists presented papers relevant to ecolinguistics. Of these papers all were given by academicians from European and Australian universities, hence the relevance and applicability of the discipline outside these circles is raised. The first AILA session in ecolinguistics was held in 1990 and since that time there has not been a great increase in the absolute number of ecolinguists attending such sessions. Furthermore the theoretical weight of these presentations for taking the discipline further is questionable as many of these papers merely reinterpreted old ideas and were limited both in terms of empirical analysis and theoretical scope. What I hope to open up here is a new way of looking at ecolinguistics in light of an Indian/Eastern perspective with the aim to:

1. Take ecolinguistics beyond its strong Western foundations and analyses, and

2. Offer stronger theoretical and practical considerations for ecolinguistics, which following from the above seems to be needed.

Here I attempt to move away from the current trends in, for example, environmental discourse analysis and move towards an initial argument and basis for which the broader theoretical points of the future of ecolinguistics can stand. In this paper I will only be presenting a small subset of the data that I have amassed on field trips to Norfolk Island. It is this larger data set and evolving theoretical framework that I will use to expand the conceptual foundations of ecolinguistics. This is definitely not the last word on this matter and it is quite an ambitious undertaking to employ medieval Indian poetry in parallel with an analysis of placenames on a small island in the South Pacific Ocean to speculate, consider and arrive at a practical theory, philosophy and understanding of language, nature, place and life. This said, ecolinguistics has always strived for a synthesis in understanding the human being and its mental, cognitive and linguistic relationships in the environment and the world so being game and proposing a new approach is certainly welcomed.

## **2 Ecolinguistics: From Broad to Focussed**

Surveying the literature in ecolinguistics reveals that although there has been a fair amount of theoretical development, the empirical focus and use of detailed case studies to illustrate theoretical findings and proposals has certainly gone wanting. Mühlhäusler and Peace (2006) have summarised much work in ecological discourse and give a good general survey of the discipline while Alexander (2009) presents a more empirical study of many of the principles important to analysing the linguistic and philosophical aspects of environmentalism and their discussion in the media. These approaches to environmental discourse analysis offer several keys to open up texts to linguistic analysis by:

1. Looking in detail at lexicogrammatical facets of texts, and

2. Drawing conclusions regarding the contextualisation of texts.

The empirical approach to ecolinguistics has mainly been limited to:

1. Analysis of word lists and folk lexicon, e.g. Schultz (2001), Little (1999),

2. Grammatical analyses, e.g. Goatly (2001), Halliday (2001), and

3. Environmental discourse analysis, e.g. Alexander (2009), Mühlhäusler (2001).

My argument and criticism of research hitherto conducted in ecolinguistics is that it has not focussed on case studies where these linguistic levels are applied to real data eliciting palpable, usable and replicable results and that where empirical data has been analysed, the broader applicability of results is questionable as the conceptual foundation of the case studies is too broad. This is where I propose the treatment of two extremely focussed data sets – a small list of local, esoteric placenames on Norfolk Island, South Pacific, and verse 12 of Hit Hari Vansh Goswami's poem the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* – for their power to propose some theoretical direction in and for ecolinguistics. Further I aim to argue that by analysing two data sets on either extreme of the pragmatic (communicative and informative function, i.e. placenames on Norfolk Island) and semantic (aesthetic, essential and meaning-based qualities, i.e. *Hit Chaurasi Pad*) continuum suggestions toward a model of the relation between language in practice and language in essence will arise. This will in turn put forward a framework for understanding the interaction between language and nature or *bhasha* and *prakriti* in the Indian context respectively.

### 3 Research Rationale

The data sets and locations, Norfolk Island and Vrindavan, were selected for practical purposes: I have experience and have been involved in longitudinal research into observing relationships between language, culture and environment for several years in both locations. In this sense I treat Norfolk Island as an ecolinguistic snapshot, i.e. a manageable case study for observing relationships between language, human perception of the environment and environmental management, and specifically the erotic poetry of the saints of Vrindavan as important philosophical underpinnings for the modern environmental movement that arose in the 1970s dedicated to the conservation of the medieval holy town that was once a verdant forest and playpen for the enjoyment of the Divine Couple and representatives of the Cosmic Duality, Radha-Krishna. Location maps for both settings are given below in Figure 1 and Figure 2:



Figure 1 - Norfolk Island location map



Figure 2 – Vrindavan location map

My main assumption in undertaking this analysis is that by using two minimal data sets and exposing them to a research framework common in ecolinguistics concrete results proposing some basic principles about how human beings speak about and orientate themselves in the environment will arise.

#### 4 Methodology

My argument is based in observing interactions between lexicon and its ability to describe the environment and events that took place in this environment of a small data set of five unofficial Norfolk Island toponyms, i.e. placenames that do not appear on official maps, which I have acquired through archival and interview research on Norfolk Island during fieldwork in 2007 and 2008. This data is provided below in Table 1. These placenames are described and considered with reference to their placement within the folk lexicon of Norfolk, the language of Norfolk Island, and how these esoteric placenames illustrate how users of these names conceptualise their natural and cultural environment and orientate themselves in history and place and time and space. Here the pragmatic domain of communication is emphasised.

Hari Vansh's canonical work, the *Hit Chaurasi Pad*, has been analysed from several historical and hagiographical perspectives (see particularly Snell 1991). My methodology though observing an entirely different genre of data is essentially the same as the method employed to evaluate Norfolk placenames: how do humans cognise the world and orientate themselves linguistically in nature and moreover how does a poet illustrate and make famous the ability of his characters through metaphor and imagery in seemingly endless time and space to be in consonance with real places and real environments that still exist today in the modern day city of Vrindavan, India? The semantic, artistic and essentialist domain of communication here is emphasised. What I offer is initial research into a proposed new translation and interpretation of the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* in English from an environmental angle as well as suggesting the relevance of the work to broad ecolinguistic analysis.

In conclusion I compare the results of the respective analyses and relate the combined outcomes of the research to ecolinguistic theory while proposing future and further directions for the field as a whole.

## 5 Norfolk Island, South Pacific: An Ecolinguistic Snapshot

Elsewhere I have outlined the relationship between Norfolk Island and the Indian context (Nash in press). On the surface there may not appear to be many parallels between the analysis of placenames in a South Pacific contact language and a medieval devotional poem in Braj Bhasha, the dialect of Hindi spoken in the Braj area of northern India, but here I propose that it is these two examples each on either extreme of the semantic-pragmatic continuum that will bear some ecolinguistic fruit.

The Norfolk language is a contact or mixed language spoken by approximately 300 descendants from Pitcairn Island on Norfolk Island, a small island of 36 square kilometres in size 1700 kilometres east of Sydney and situated between New Caledonia and New Zealand. The status of the language has received a fair amount of research interest while the typology of the language remains unclear (Mühlhäusler 2007). My concern here will be with an aspect of research into Norfolk that remains largely unwritten, viz., Norfolk placenames and more specifically unofficial, esoteric insider placenames. Norfolk Island's starkly demarcated historical periods provide historians and linguists with relatively clear-cut historical periods and reliable and traceable data concerning the human-environment situation at particular points in time.

A very deliberate list of five Norfolk placenames was chosen for its descriptive power and for its ability to convey meaning-laden insider sociocultural, historical and environmental concepts that are so prevalent in the Norfolk language. These names were all acquired during interview based fieldwork with informants on Norfolk Island in February 2008. The list is presented below in Table 1:

Norfolk	English	Etymology
1. Johnny and Nigger Bun Et	Johnny and Nigger Burnt It	3. An area where two local men lit a fire that burnt out of control.
2. Side Ar Whale Es	Literally 'the place where the whale is' or 'Whale('s) Place)	A land feature which when looked at from a distance resembles a whale.
3. Parloo Park	Masturbation Park	An area young boys and girls used to frequent on their first meeting.
4. Foote Nort	Why not	Eldon Foote's property; humorous and quirky allusion to common Norfolk expression 'foot nort' English: why not.
5. Em Steps	The Steps	The Norfolk name for the convict steps on Nepean Island, the small island 800 metres south of Norfolk Island; also known as 'Dem Steps'.

The location of these places on Norfolk Island is presented diagrammatically below in Figure 3:



Figure 3 – Location of five Norf’k placenames on Norfolk Island

Place names are linguistic, cultural and environmental markers of history and tools to create, perpetuate and narrate stories. This situation is more pronounced when:

1. There is language contact where conflicting and complimentary stories between and across cultures can arise, and
2. A group of people is forced to speak about, manage and live in a new and unfamiliar environment.

Example 1 illustrates among other things a common trait of Norf’k phonology namely word final consonant loss, i.e. Norf’k ‘bun’ for English ‘burnt’. This is possibly a residual Polynesian feature in the language (cf. Ross & Moverley 1964) reflecting its linguistic connection to Polynesia and Tahiti and the initial contact language that developed on Pitcairn Island after the Bounty mutiny took place in 1789. ‘Johnny and Nigger Bun Et’ further refers to two well-known Norfolk Islanders and the activity that led to the naming of the area, lighting wood fires so the whalers offshore would not lose their way back to shore at night, solidifies an element of Norfolk’s cultural landscape into a name associated directly with a place on the north coast of the island few people know about.

Example 2 provides evidence of the descriptive power of the landscape and how humans name places based on their perception of a topographical feature and possibly its utilitarian nature. One informant intimated to me that ‘Side Ar Whale Es’ looks like a whale if one looks at it in the right manner and uses a bit of imagination. It also shows how esoteric names can be as this name was only known by one of my informants and it was most likely he who named it. This name also illustrates various distinguishing aspects of Norf’k syntax from English – the formation of the genitive construction, e.g. ‘Whale(s) Place’ is one possible translation of ‘Side Ar Whale Es’ in English. The work Norf’k syntax does in and by producing such constructions in placename grammar as well as in spoken sentences demonstrates the power the language possesses in its potential to demarcate itself from the linguistic stranglehold of English. Here we see the strength of

Norfolk in creating sociolinguistic boundaries and how it forges strong relationships with people and place, namely the folk and people of Norfolk Island.

'Parloo Park', literally 'Masturbation Park', is an area in the south west of Norfolk which has been known to be a haunt for young couples' courting behaviour. That locals remember and have named this locale indicates a strong event based memory of the happenings in the area and reflects the phenomenon of action and incident in relation to place being crystallised into language use. The name also reveals the presence of Polynesian elements in the language and further the use of Tahitian lexicon for taboo elements in (particularly) human behaviour and bodily functions once again depicts a strong link between individuals and language in the Norfolk setting. This is also one of the few Norfolk placenames of distinct Polynesian origin.

Example 4 'Foote Nort' presents a placename directly associated with a person, Eldon Foote, who used to live in the Rocky Point area. The humorous and quirky allusion to the common Norfolk expression, 'foot nort' (English: why not), is based on phonological similarity between the Norfolk adverb and the gentleman's name. This exemplifies an aspect of unofficial naming that is often overlooked – people name places for fun and to pass time. In this example Eldon Foote, a Canadian philanthropist, has been linguistically concretised in place and space in the Norfolk environment while at the same time lexified into the folk lexicon and intimately associated with the Norfolk language, although Foote was not a Norfolk Islander or Norfolk speaker.

'Em Steps' and the variation 'Dem Steps' (English: The Steps) refers to the convict steps on the eastern coast of Nepean Island, a small uninhabited island part of the Norfolk archipelago 800 metres south of Norfolk. The steps and the subsequent English name, 'The Convict Steps', developed during sandstone excavation that took place throughout the convict settlement on Norfolk prior to the arrival of the Pitcairners in 1856. Although there is no direct relation between the Norfolk Islanders and the events that created the convict steps as a topographical feature, a Norfolk name has developed and is an integral part of the folk lexicon and toponymy of Nepean Island, especially among the local fishers. This additionally emphasises the difficulty in the semantics of delineating what constitutes a Norfolk or an English name in the complicated tapestry of language contact in the toponymy of Norfolk Island. That is, syntactic and phonological analysis of names will often not give us clues as to how Norfolk Island toponyms should be classified. These five examples and the theoretical development arising from this brief analysis will be discussed separately and in relation to the findings relevant to ecolinguistics from the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* in section 7 below.

## **6 Vrindavan: The Terrestrial Stage**

The cultural and social aspects of Vrindavan have been explicated by Growse (1882) in the first detailed expose of the Radha-Vallabh temple tradition to the English speaking world. It is this tradition of the worship of Radha-Krishna and the founder Hit Hari Vansh Mahaprabhu's seminal poem *Hit Chaurasi Pad* (*Eighty-four Stanzas*) that form the philosophical basis of this analysis.

I have chosen one complete stanza of the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* in two different translations to look at in detail for its environmental and linguistic aspects. Verse 12 of the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* was selected for pragmatic reasons – it is the first verse in the work that explicitly:

1. States precise geographical locations in Vrindavan, e.g. Yamuna, Vamshivat,
2. Employs complex environmental imagery and relies on the use of descriptive metaphor, e.g. 'where the earth is supremely beautiful' and 'moonlight is brilliantly clear' (White 1977: 61), and
3. Refers directly to the flora of Vrindavan, e.g. 'new bower' and 'jasmine is budding slightly' (Snell 1991: 193)

and synthesises them into an analysable whole. I now employ Verse 12 of Hari Vansh's aesthetic treatise on nature, love, life and spirit to unpack and develop the locational, environmental, metaphorical and botanical parameters of a new theoretical focus in ecolinguistics. The two translations of Verse 12 of the *Hit Chaurasi Pad* are presented below:

- 1 Come, wise Radhika! For your sake Shyam has arranged a round-dance,  
a store of joy, on the bank of the Yamuna:
- 2 groups of young girls dance in great eagerness at the music and merriment  
as the joyful flute, source of delight, is playing.
- 3 In that most pleasing place near the *vamshivata*  
a soft breeze blows from the [sandal-clad] Malaya mountain,  
yielding all joys.
- 4 the forest is strongly fragrant with half-blown jasmine,  
and there is bright moonlight in the full-moon autumn night.
- 5 Cowherd girl, feast your eyes on Naravahana's Lord,  
whose head-to-toe beauty removes the agony of desire;
- 6 lady! Experience this ocean of delight, rejoice with your arms  
joined around his neck.

For Shyama's sport in the fresh bower is worthy of the world's praise!  
(Snell 1991: 193)

#### TWELVE

O clever Radha, come along!

For Your sake, Shyam, the Abode of Pleasure, has brought forth  
The Rasa Lila on the banks of the Daughter of Kalimda (Yamuna).(1)

A company of maidens dances in front of him:  
They are filled with great joy at the raga's tone.  
He plays his blessed flute, the source of rasa. (2)

Around the Vamshivat (the tree beneath which Krishna stands to entice the gopis) there,  
Where the earth is supremely beautiful,  
The scent of sandalwood blows on the gentle air, giving ease to all. (3)

The jasmine is budding slightly:  
The forest is extremely fragrant. On the full-moon night  
Of the month of Sharad the moonlight is brilliantly clear. (4)

The Lord, the Vehicle of Salvation for men,  
Gazed and filled his eyes with the Herdsman's Daughter (Radha) –  
Beautiful from head to foot, the destroyer of amorous distress. (5)

O Lady, enjoy his arms encircling your neck.  
Bear the Ocean of Pleasure!  
Shyam's love play in the new bower is worthy of the praise of the world. (6)  
(White 1977: 60-61)



I begin by first dividing aspects of the stanza into three categories: places, flora and environmental events/things. These are presented below in Table 1 (Snell translation) and Table 2 (White translation):

Places	Flora	Environmental events/things
(Bank of the) Yamuna (1) Vamshivata (2) Malaya mountain (3) Most pleasing place (3) Forest (4)	Half-blown jasmine (4) Fresh bower (6)	Soft breeze (3) Bright moonlight (4) Full-moon Autumn night (4) Ocean of delight (6)

**Table 1 – Environmental Aspects of Stanza 12 of *Hit Chaurasi Pad* from Snell (1991: 193)**

Places	Flora	Environmental events/things
On the banks of the Daughter of Kalimda (Yamuna) (1) Vamshivat (2) Forest (4)	Jasmine is budding slightly (4) New bower (6)	Where the earth is supremely beautiful (3) Jasmine is budding slightly (3) Forest is extremely fragrant Scent of sandalwood blows on the gentle air (3) Moonlight is brilliantly clear (3) Full-moon night (4) Ocean of pleasure (6)

**Table 2 – Environmental Aspects of Stanza 12 of *Hit Chaurasi Pad* from White (1977: 60-61)**

Hari Vansh locates his work in time (full-moon Autumn night) and space/place (Yamuna bank near Vamshivata). Situated in the north-eastern part of Vrindavan, Vamshivat is depicted linguistically as the celestial bower and playpen of Shyamaa-Shyam or Radha-Krishna. He introduces the scene and setting by relating the ‘most pleasing place’, Vamshivat on the Yamuna bank, to the natural surroundings - Malaya mountain, supremely beautiful earth, budding jasmine, soft breeze - and in turn introduces the human aspect in the latter part of the verse to this exquisite natural setting. It is the human in the form of Shyam (Krishna) constructed by an array of metaphors and how this depiction relates to the natural environment that is of interest to ecolinguistics. Metaphorically Krishna is constructed as:

1. The Vehicle of Salvation,
2. The Abode of Pleasure,
3. The Ocean of Pleasure, and
4. The Ocean of Delight.

Krishna, the provider of liberation, is likened to a thing – a vehicle, abode and ocean – fixed sturdily and with strength within the pleasure environment of the fresh bower created for cosmic interaction with his consort, Radha, ‘the destroyer of amorous distress’. Humans are equated to special thought interactors in the lap of nature whose duty is to enjoy the cosmic love play in the bower and be active participants in the sport that “is worthy of the praise of the world” (White 1977: 61). Here I emphasise that language and specifically the semantic facet of communicating, e.g. word sense, metaphors and interpretations of meaning laden lexemes, all contribute to an environmental reading of Hari Vansh’s work.

Words and concepts relating to environmental events/things, e.g. ‘scent of sandalwood blows on the gentle air’, earth, forest, ‘bright moonlight’, all represent a conception of nature, here symbolised and individualised by Hit Hari Vansh and translated from Braj Bhasha Hindi to English,

which epitomises the cognitive capacity and adaptability of humans to abstract things conceptually from the world, create names for things which are of use to them, relate these creatively and artistically to myths and stories passed down through the ages and live a life in close presence and consonance with nature and the rest of human society.

Humans, words and nature in the poet's view are all a part of the cosmic system and thus words and how we describe nature affect our perception of our natural environment; Vrindavan is an example of the dialectic between human and nature and language and thought (Bang & Døør 2007) and Hari Vansh's contribution helps us consider the relationships between sound and silence, word and sentence, meaning and function and subject and object. Hari Vansh's word illustration of a canvas of interaction between the human, mind, nature and cosmos presents a new realm and possibility for ecolinguistics to move beyond its firmly Western foundations and into an Eastern understanding of the conception of language and particularly semantics and invite and encourage further theoretical development from this differing perspective.

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

Referring to the tasks I set myself at the beginning of this paper I have attempted to put an ecolinguistic analysis into an Eastern conception of language and nature and have coupled this with an extremely focussed study of very specific empirical and real data from what I claim is an appropriate case study for ecolinguistics, namely Norfolk Island. I emphasised the pragmatic domain of communication with respect to Norfolk as:

1. The insider placenames described form an important part of the descriptive spatial and orientational lexicon of a distinct section of the Norfolk population which is used in their everyday communication, and
2. Through usage these names in direct contact with the place and environment of Norfolk have become solidified into the Norfolk language.

The historical and environmental parameters of this section of the Norfolk lexicon lend themselves very well to adaptation and environmental change due to their unofficial and folk nature. It is certainly these facets and functions of language where traditional classification systems and analytical tools, e.g. conventional methods for distinguishing between and describing pidgins and creoles and other contact languages (see Sebba 1997, Reinecke et al. 1975), do not fit that must be at least one of the foci of further studies into the pragmatic arena of ecolinguistic theory. I suggest that small case studies based in interaction with real people, real data and vibrant communication situations provide an approach to exploring this element of language and environment interaction.

On the other end of the communication spectrum I have used Hari Vansh's *Hit Chaurasi Pad* to emphasise the relationship between semantics, sense and place and how these are communicated artistically in an English translation of a devotional poem. My claim, however, is that although these case studies are on opposite ends of the pragmatics – semantics continuum and illustrate different levels of abstraction from real communication situations, the principles involved in naming things, interacting with the environment cognitively and linguistically and creating meaning and attachment to space and place are essentially the same: there are utilitarian reasons, practical motives and situational and historical bases for names and the practice of naming things and ultimately how humans locate themselves in a given environment. Further reflection and analysis of available data will bring forth additional findings into the complex relationships that ecolinguistics seeks to explore. This I claim is where the steps forward in furthering the theoretical development and synthesis of ecolinguistics in the West and the East are required. It is with this sense of hope, anticipation and eagerness for continued research into understanding interactions between humans, language and environment that I conclude with an invitation to my readers and co-researchers.

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