
Cultivating Ecological Sensitivity: How Ecolinguistics Enhances Descriptive Writing Skills at UPMI

Puji Hariati

Department of English Teaching, University of Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI)
zeenasution@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how the integration of ecolinguistic principles in teaching descriptive writing could enhance students' writing skills and ecological sensitivity. The research involved 30 third semester students of the English education program at University of Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI). Using a qualitative descriptive approach with elements of classroom action research. Data were collected through pre-test and post test, classroom observation, questionnaires, and interview. The findings revealed significant improvements in students' paragraph structure, ecological vocabulary, and empathetic expression towards environmental issues. A total of 80% of students demonstrated improved paragraph unity and coherence, 70% used environmentally themed vocabulary and metaphors, and 65% explicitly expressed ecological values in their writing. These results indicate that the ecolinguistic approach not only enhances the quality of descriptive writing but also cultivates environmental awareness through language. The study recommends integrating ecolinguistic content into language curricula to support sustainable education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The current global ecological crisis, such as climate change, deforestation, environmental pollution, and species extinction, requires the involvement of all sectors, including education. English language education as part of humanities education has a strategic role in instilling values of sustainability and environmental concern. In this context, a new approach called ecolinguistics has emerged, which combines linguistic studies with ecological issues and environmental ethics.

Ecolinguistics is an interdisciplinary discipline that studies how language reflects, shapes, and influences the way humans view and treat nature. Stibbe (2015) emphasizes that language stores “stories we live by”, narratives, metaphors, and linguistic constructions means of communication, but also an ideological means that can strengthen or challenge practices that damage the environment.

In the context of learning to write in higher education, the descriptive writing genre is an effective vehicle for fostering environmental sensitivity. According to Hyland (2019), description requires sensitivity to detail and in-depth observation of objects or phenomena, aligning with the principles of ecolinguistics. Through environmentally themed descriptive

writing activities, students are not only trained in writing skills but are also encouraged to recognize the importance of maintaining ecological balance.

Despite these recognized benefits, many classrooms—particularly in Indonesia—have yet to integrate ecolinguistic principles into writing instruction. For example, initial observations of students in the English Education Program at the University of Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI) revealed that writing lessons still focus narrowly on structure and grammar, neglecting ecological themes. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how ecolinguistics can be incorporated into descriptive writing pedagogy, enhancing both students' writing proficiency and their ecological awareness.

Previous research has shown great potential for this approach. Han & Yan (2021) in their study concluded that the integration of ecolinguistics in language teaching helps students build ecological awareness through text. Likewise, Ma & Liu (2023) found that students who were given environmental themed writing assignments showed improvements in both writing quality and empathy for ecological issues. This shows the urgency and relevance of this research in the context of higher education in Indonesia.

Djuwari (2021) found EFL students in Surabaya produced 40% richer environmental descriptions after ecolinguistic training. Meanwhile, Goulah (2020) proved that *eco-ethical language tasks boost learners' ecological empathy by 65%*. In Indonesia, Sutedi (2020) documented how ecolinguistics reframed “rivers” as “living ecosystems” in student essays, aligning with UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) goals.

Despite these advances, no research has integrated ecolinguistics into descriptive writing pedagogy for English Education students in Sumatra's socio-ecological context. Sumatra's unique environment—home to critically endangered species like the Sumatran tiger and orangutan, vast peatlands crucial for carbon storage, and Indigenous communities whose lifeways are tied to forest ecosystems—demands pedagogical approaches that address localized ecological tensions, such as deforestation and unsustainable palm oil expansion. This study addresses that void, leveraging UPMI's commitment to community empowerment (UPMI Strategic Plan, 2023) to cultivate future teachers who write with ecological sensitivity.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with elements of Classroom Action Research (CAR), aiming to explore how the integration of ecolinguistics into descriptive writing classes influences both students' writing skills and ecological sensitivity. Qualitative design is chosen to gain in depth understanding of students' experiences and perceptions, while the action research cycle allows iterative improvement through reflection and intervention (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 2014). According to Burns (2010), CAR is particularly suitable in educational contexts because it empowers teachers to investigate and improve their classroom practice systematically. The study is conducted over two cycles of intervention and reflection, focusing on how ecolinguistically enriched instruction through texts, images, and creative prompts affects students' ability to describe nature and express ecological awareness through writing.

Participants

The participants of this study are 30 students from class A. Semester 3, enrolled in the English Education Program at University of Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI). These students are currently taking the course “Paragraph Writing”, which provides a suitable platform to implement and assess ecolinguistic based writing activities. The

selection of participants follows a purposive sampling technique, targeting students who have already acquired basic paragraph writing skills and prepared to advance into more complex and thematic writing genres.

Instruments

To gather comprehensive data, this study employs multiple instruments. A writing rubric is used to evaluate students' descriptive texts across several dimensions, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and ecological insight. Classroom observations are documented through an observation sheet, which records instructional activities, student engagement, and teacher interventions during ecolinguistics lessons. Additionally, a questionnaire is administered to assess students' environmental awareness, their attitudes toward ecological themes, and their experiences with nature-based descriptive writing. To complement these methods, semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected participants, providing deeper insights into their personal reflections and perceptions of learning descriptive writing through an ecolinguistic lens. This multi-method approach, drawing on Creswell and Poth's (2018) principles of triangulation, enhances the study's validity and ensures a robust analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Research Procedures

This study follows four main procedures. First, a pre-test on descriptive writing is administered, where students write a paragraph on a general topic without prior exposure to ecolinguistic materials. This task establishes a baseline for evaluating their initial descriptive writing skills and ecological awareness.

Next, instruction incorporates ecolinguistic materials, including eco-texts such as excerpts from environmental literature or articles, as well as visual prompts depicting deforestation, pollution, biodiversity, and natural landscapes to inspire descriptive responses. The pedagogical approach also integrates eco-poetry, nature quotes, and vocabulary banks featuring adjectives and phrases common in nature writing. This aligns with Stibbe's (2015) emphasis on "positive ecological discourse" as a means to foster pro-environmental thinking through language.

Following the instructional phase, a post-test is conducted, where students complete a second descriptive writing task using ecolinguistic prompts. Their pre- and post-test outputs are then analyzed using a writing rubric to assess improvements in both descriptive quality and ecological content.

Finally, the study includes a reflection and interview phase. Students engage in classroom reflections through journals or group discussions, while eight selected participants undergo in-depth interviews to explore their personal responses to ecolinguistic instruction and its impact on their ecological awareness. This methodology draws on precedents like Ma and Liu's (2023) use of reflective journaling and post-writing interviews to measure ecological engagement in language learning.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study was conducted with 30 third-semester students enrolled in the Paragraph Writing course within the English Education Program at the University of Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI). The research aimed to examine how an ecolinguistic approach could enhance both descriptive writing skills and ecological awareness among participants.

Initial pre-test results revealed that most students demonstrated limited descriptive writing capabilities, primarily focused on structural elements such as grammar and coherence. Only 20% of submissions incorporated environmental themes or natural imagery, with the majority producing generic texts lacking substantive ecological values.

Classroom observations during the intervention phase documented significant developments as students engaged with ecolinguistic materials across two instructional cycles. These materials included environmentally themed descriptive texts addressing topics like deforestation and endangered species, comparative visual stimuli of degraded versus pristine ecosystems, nature poetry and quotations, and targeted ecological vocabulary instruction. The sessions elicited marked increases in student engagement, with participants demonstrating greater enthusiasm for environmental writing topics, more active discussion participation, enriched descriptive lexicons, and emerging expressions of ecological empathy.

Post-test outcomes, measured through nature-themed writing prompts, showed substantial improvement. Approximately 80% of submissions exhibited enhanced structural coherence and paragraph unity, while 70% incorporated ecological terminology and positive natural metaphors. Notably, 65% of texts explicitly addressed conservation ethics, critiqued environmental degradation, or articulated pro-environmental values—demonstrating how ecolinguistic pedagogy enriched both compositional quality and ecological consciousness.

Supplementary data from questionnaires and interviews reinforced these findings. Eighty-seven percent of respondents reported heightened environmental awareness attributable to the ecolinguistic curriculum, with 76% acknowledging altered approaches to nature description through engagement with materials like ecological poetry and deforestation visuals. Qualitative feedback included reflective statements such as, "I never realized writing could contribute to environmental protection—now I understand the power of words," underscoring the approach's transformative potential in aligning linguistic development with ecological stewardship.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with and extend current research on ecolinguistic pedagogy. Han and Yan's (2021) work similarly demonstrates how ecolinguistic approaches can simultaneously enhance ecological awareness and linguistic expression among EFL learners, suggesting that the integration of environmental themes with language instruction creates transformative learning experiences. This dual benefit was evident in our study, where students not only improved their descriptive writing skills but also developed greater environmental sensitivity.

The theoretical foundation for these outcomes can be traced to Stibbe's (2015) concept of language as a repository for "stories we live by"—the narratives and metaphors that unconsciously shape human relationships with nature. By engaging students in environmental descriptive writing, our approach helped them consciously examine and reconstruct these narratives. Students moved beyond merely learning writing techniques;

they began understanding the significance of their words in shaping ecological perspectives, answering not just what to describe, but why and how to do so meaningfully.

These results further resonate with Capra's (2002) principles of ecological pedagogy, which advocate for education that strengthens human-nature connections. In writing instruction, this manifests as a shift from anthropocentric, exploitative narratives toward reciprocal ones that acknowledge nature's intrinsic value. Our students' post-intervention writings exemplified this transition, increasingly featuring themes of conservation ethics and environmental stewardship.

Recent scholarship corroborates these findings. Lestari's (2022) research revealed that incorporating local environmental issues made student writing more reflective, while Ma and Liu (2023) found that ecolinguistic poetry heightened empathy for ecological crises. Similarly, Wang's (2020) work on nature-themed storytelling demonstrated its power to foster "linguistic ecological consciousness" in university settings. Collectively, these studies affirm the viability of ecolinguistics as a pedagogical framework.

This study contributes to this growing body of evidence by demonstrating three key outcomes: First, it confirms that ecolinguistic materials improve writing structurally, enhancing paragraph coherence, lexical variety, and textual cohesion. Second, it cultivates sensitivity to environmental issues at both local and global scales. Third, and perhaps most significantly, it provides learners with an emotionally and ethically meaningful educational experience. These findings underscore that language education transcends technical communication skills—it is a potent medium for cultural and value transformation, capable of nurturing both linguistic competence and ecological citizenship.

III. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that integrating ecolinguistic principles into descriptive writing instruction yields dual benefits for English Education students at UPMI, enhancing both writing proficiency and ecological consciousness. The qualitative and quantitative data reveal four significant outcomes. First, ecolinguistic materials—including eco-poetry, nature-themed texts, and visual prompts—substantially improved students' descriptive writing quality, with 80% of post-intervention submissions showing enhanced structural coherence, lexical variety, and textual cohesion. This aligns with Hyland's (2019) view of descriptive writing as a vehicle for expanded linguistic expression when paired with meaningful content. Second, students developed heightened ecological awareness, as evidenced by their increased engagement with environmental issues; 65% of post-test writings incorporated explicit ecological critiques or conservation ethics, corroborating findings by Han and Yan (2021) and Goulah (2020) on ecolinguistics' role in fostering environmental empathy. Third, the study revealed that language learning transcended technical skill development, becoming an ethically charged ecological experience. Participant reflections underscored their newfound recognition of language's power to shape environmental ideologies—a realization that mirrors Stibbe's (2015) paradigm of transformative "stories we live by." Fourth, the research underscores the particular relevance of ecolinguistic pedagogy for local educational contexts like Sumatra, where UPMI's community empowerment mission converges with urgent regional ecological challenges. As Sutedi (2020) contends, such approaches can effectively localize global sustainability discourses while nurturing culturally grounded ecological citizenship.

To maximize the potential of ecolinguistic pedagogy, three actionable recommendations emerge from this study. Educators should prioritize locally relevant

environmental themes in writing tasks, as contextualized content deepens student engagement and cultural relevance. Institutions must invest in teacher training programs that equip instructors with ecolinguistic methodologies and resources, ensuring the approach's effective implementation. Finally, researchers are encouraged to undertake comparative cross-institutional studies to evaluate the scalability of ecolinguistic writing instruction across diverse educational settings, particularly in ecologically vulnerable regions where language education could contribute to broader sustainability goals. Collectively, these measures can amplify the transformative potential of ecolinguistics in shaping both skilled writers and environmentally responsible citizens.

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