Ecological approaches in linguistics: a historical overview

Hildo Honório do Couto

Department of Linguistics, University of Brasília, 70910-900 Brasília, Brazil

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Ecolinguistics
Ecology
History
Practitioners
Paradigm

ABSTRACT

The first objective of this paper is to give an historical overview of ecolinguistics, beginning with a discussion of its affinity with ecology. Then the paper presents some of the precursors of ecolinguistics, going onto the emergence of the discipline in the 1970s. Further, it gives a general conspectus of ecolinguistics as it exists today, including some of the most important ecolinguistics groups, events, and publications as well as individual investigators. Finally, it discusses the idea of ecolinguistics as a paradigm for the sciences of language, suggesting that it would probably be preferable to see it as a platform from which we could study any language phenomena from a unified point of view.

1. Introduction

Einar Haugen, at the beginning of the 1970s, defined “ecology of language” and “language ecology” as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment” (Haugen, 1972: 325). Since the end of that decennium, ecolinguistics has been defined as the study of “the (inter-)relationships between language and (its) environment”. All these alternative formulations of the definition have important implications. Some of them could be subsumed under the following questions:

(1) What is language?
(2) What is the environment of language?
(3) What are the (inter-)relationships between language and environment?
(4) Do these relations take place between language and its environment or between language and environment in general (environmentalism)?
(5) Are the influences between language and environment unidirectional or bidirectional?

Due to space limitations, it will not be possible to answer all these questions. What I give in several places below is some brief suggestions of answers to some of them, although each one of them could be the subject of a whole essay.

Ecolinguistics is a relatively new discipline. According to Makkai (1993: 8), it “is merely in statu nascendi and has a long way to go before it can fulfill any of its own goals and aspirations”. Nowadays, this seems not to be valid any more. The simple fact that we are dedicating a volume of this journal to it is proof of the contrary. It is true that it is not a unified enterprise. However, there are many points of view which, in my opinion, are a sign of its vitality.

This essay is an attempt at giving an historical overview of the new discipline of ecolinguistics. Some authors have already outlined its short history. The first of them is one of its most important figures, namely Fill (1993, 1998/2001). The second is Verhagen (2000). Mühlhäusler (2003) contains a chapter entitled “Towards a history of ecolinguistics”. Calvet’s (1999) “Introduction” also has some information on the subject. Finally, Couto (2007a) includes a whole chapter dealing with it.
2. Ecolinguistics and ecology

As pointed out by Fill (1996: 17), “some ecolinguists start at the ecology end and transfer ecological principles to language, while others start at the language end and bring linguistics to ecology”. This means that ecolinguistics is intimately intertwined with ecology one way or the other. Unfortunately, in both ways, ecolinguists run the risk of reifying language, i.e., of considering it a thing located somewhere and related to its environment. However, if we depart from the central concept of ecology, ecosystem, we have a way out of this reification. Ecosystem consists of a population of organisms, living in their territory (environment), and the inter-relationships that obtain between the organisms and the environment as well as between members of the population. One of the most important features of any ecosystem is the diversity of species living in it. The greater the diversity, the stronger the system is. Let us now turn to some of the linguistic homologues of these ecological concepts.

The equivalent of ecosystem in language studies is the linguistic ecosystem, which is more commonly called speech/language community. The equivalent of population of organisms is people or population, living in its territory. The ecological inter-relationships (behavior) are equivalent to language. In other words, from this point of view language is a network of interactions, not a thing. These interactions may take place between members of the population and the world, in the neuronal connections of the brain and between language and society. Language as interaction is implicit in Humboldt's Energie (Tätigkeit), in the works of Eugenio Coseriu as well as in Lamb's stratificational grammar, now called neurocognitive linguistics. In summary, all interactionists, as opposed to formalists, see language as activity, and grammar as a part of it. In this case, the environment of language is where these inter-relationships take place. In other words, inside this basic linguistic ecosystem, the world (including its population) constitutes the natural environment of language.

A second way of seeing the relationship between language and its environment was mentioned by Haugen, who said that “language exists only in the minds of its users”. This is also the case with the rationalist philosophy, including Chomsky's generative grammar. In this case, language is seen as a mental phenomenon, and the brain/mind constitutes the mental environment of language.

A third way of interpreting the relationships between language and environment is the one preferred by Haugen (1972: 325). According to him, “the true environment of language is the society that uses it as one of its codes”. This is essentially what is done by present-day sociolinguistics, of which Haugen himself was one of the most prominent representatives. Discourse analysis, among others, is also one of these approaches. Here society is the social environment of language.

These three environments of language are reminiscent of Doer's and Bang's (1996: 23) three dimensions of bio-logics (natural), ideo-logics (mental) and socio-logics (social). It also has something to do with Peter Finke's and Wilhelm Trampe's Sprache-Welt-System. It is also implied in Fill's (1993: 4) definition of ecolinguistics. For more discussion on these environments of language, see Couto (2007a,b, 2009).

In view of what has just been said, it is important to make clear which environment we are referring to when we define ecolinguistics as the study of the relationships between language and environment. We have seen that there are at least the natural, the mental and the social environments of language. In this case, we do not run the risk of falling into ecologism nor of doing social Darwinism, a danger pointed out by deep ecology's creator Arne Naess. According to this view, language is seen as a network of inter-relationships. Fill (1993: 5) said that “Strukturalismus untersucht und beschreibt den Zustand des Wassers beim Staudamm (Synchronie) oder die Entwicklung einer Welle auf dem Fluss (Diachronie), Ökologie betrachtet das Fliessen selbst”. Ecolinguistics homologizes to this flowing, not to organisms or species.

There are those investigators who do not mention ecology, even if they deal with environmental questions or environmentalism. Implicitly, however, most of their research has to do with diversity (of species, behavior, languages, dialects, cultures, ideologies, etc.), which is a vital property of ecosystems. In what follows, I will consider as ecolinguist any investigator who acknowledges that he/she is doing ecolinguistics, or is using ecological concepts in his/her linguistic research and/or is dealing with environmental questions in relation to language.

3. Precursors of ecolinguistics

It is usual to look for the origins of a new discipline in ancient Greek philosophy. It is true that some ideas of ecolinguistics were already present in thinkers such as Heraclitus and Plato (in his Cratilos), among other ancient philosophers who dealt with the relation between language and world, or between word and thing. The whole metaphysical tradition saw language this way. However, we need not go so far back in time. We could begin with Humboldt (1767–1835), as has been done by some ecolinguists. We could even include some later developments of his ideas, as for instance Leo Weisgerber's Inhaltsbezogene Grammatik and Jost Trier's field theory. There is also the dialectological and the language-geographic research which leads to the linguistic atlases. The school known as Wörter und Sachen is especially important in this regard.

Closer to our times is Alfred Korzybski's (1879–1950) general semantics, with detailed reflections on the relationship between language and the world. He used to say that the map is not the territory, but a human representation of it. In the United States there is the movement that began with Franz Boas (1858–1942), went on with Sapir (1888–1939), and Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941), ending up in the well-known Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis.

Towards the second quarter of the 20th century we have the research of the two Romanian linguists Tatiana Slama-Cazacu and Eugenio Coseriu. The former published the book Language and context in 1959, which Couto (1999) considered
entirely ecolinguistic avant la lettre. The latter has always emphasized that the locus of language is the acts of the communicative interaction, which he called hablar (to speak, to talk).

In the framework of American structuralism, we have William Bull, who wrote a book on the semantics of Spanish verbs departing from the content the several verbal forms refer to, in a way similar to the onomasiological procedure of the Wörter und Sachen school. Kenneth Pike also considered language in relation to human behavior in general. Sydney Lamb’s neurocognitive linguistics sees language as a network of relations that take place in the mind/brain of its users.

Whinnom (1971) used biology (genetics) as a source of his concepts in order to explain pidginization and creolization. The creolist Salikoko Mufwene also departs from biological concepts such as species and population genetics. According to him, language is a parasitic and/or a viral species of the population. Those ecolinguists who, according to Fill, depart from language and go in the direction of ecology, frequently use other theoretical sources, such as Heidegger’s philosophy and Norman Fairclough’s ideas on critical discourse analysis.

4. The emergence of ecolinguistics

The concept of ecology was applied by Einar Haugen to the study of language for the first time in 1970, in his talk “On the ecology of languages” given at the Center for Applied Linguistics. It was published in The linguistic reporter in 1971, under the title of “The ecology of language”. In the following year it appeared in Haugen (1972) with this second title. In the printed version, he added that in an essay of 1967 by C.F. Voegelin, F.M. Voegelin and N. Schutz we can see “the only previous use of ‘ecology’ in relation to language”. The expression ‘language ecology’ also appeared in the title of his essay dedicated to Faroese (Haugen, 1979). What is more, as Adam Makkai told me, Haugen suggested the term ‘ecolinguistics’ orally to him in 1972. In this case, he could be considered a pioneer of ecolinguistics in a double sense: first, for relating language and ecology; second, for coining the word ‘ecolinguistics’, albeit suggested only orally. Haugen’s idea was followed by Mackey (1979, 1980), who applied it to the study of language contact and of language shift.

In 1972, there appeared Makkai’s essay “Pragmo-ecological grammar” in Language sciences, in the framework of stratificational grammar, which is the theoretical model he worked with. This model was influenced by Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar and by Pike’s tagmemics. The subject was taken up in Makkai (1993, pp. 15–100). Incidentally, Makkai also told me that he had been involved with the relation language-world as early as the 1950s, in Hungary.

Towards the end of the 1970s, we have a climax in the history of ecolinguistics. In 1979, Salzinger used the word ‘ecolinguistics’ for the first time in print. Salzinger was a psycholinguist, and used the word in this context. He said explicitly that he was submitting “the introduction of the new term ecolinguistics”, which “serves to include the terms psycho-, neuro-, and sociolinguistics”. He said that he would “emphasize the importance of the environment in the study of language, beginning with the assumption that language always occurs in a context and can be understood only in a context”. According to him the psycholinguists and the generativists construct sentences by “manufacturing situations” where contextual aspects are absent, adding that it is important to consider “the environment in which language behavior is emitted”. For him “it was only when psychologists varied their behavior and investigated the act of communicating rather than that of speaking that they succeeded in extinguishing the last claim of uniqueness in the human being; Darwin’s theory of evolution referred to all functions of human beings, and there was no discontinuity in the emergence of language behavior” (Salzinger, 1979).

Salzinger presented several other arguments in favor of an ecolinguistic approach to language behavior. Let us look at the one that says that

the first rule of the ecolinguistic approach, as suggested above, is generally to make use of language behavior that has been emitted under representative conditions. This should be done, whether the language behavior is used as stimulus or as response. Furthermore, wherever possible, that language behavior should be examined in its environment specified as completely as possible. (Salzinger, 1979)

In the following year, Salzinger used the term again, in an invited talk given at the Annual Meetings of the Association for Behavior Analysis, entitled “Ecolinguistics: Where behavior theory meets cognitive psychology” (Dearborn, MI, 1980).

From this time onwards, the subject of language and environment, language ecology, ecology of language and/or ecolinguistics began to pop up here and there. Bolinger, in Language, the Loaded Weapon (Bolinger, 1980), included a chapter entitled “An ecology of language”, in which he talked about pollution in the environment and in language, among other things. Haiman (1980) talked about isomorphism and motivation in language, defending the thesis that even grammar has something to do with the world. In the following year, Makkai and others published the volume The Seventh LACUS Forum, which includes the section “Ecological Linguistics” containing 14 essays. In 1982, Denison published his “A linguistic ecology for Europe?”, reproduced in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001).

Two years later, we have another high point in the history of ecolinguistics, namely the appearance of Enninger and Haynes (1984). As the editors say in the Preface, their objective was “probing the vitality of the concept of language ecology, and assessing the applicability of the ecological approach to various areas of linguistic research”. They went on to say “that the ecological approach is indeed widely considered as a productive paradigm”. In the Introduction they say that “the unifying theme . . . is the ecological approach to language and verbal behavior”, adding that “language and speech are not only co-structured with social systems and social activities, but that both of these components are simultaneously co-structured with nonverbal codes and nonverbal modes of interaction”. According to them, the paradigm of language ecology was already established at that time.
Since there is not enough space to comment on all 16 contributions, I would like at least to pick out some of them. Joachim Raith, for example, shows that language ecology deals not with the relationships between environment and language structure, but between human aggregates and respective languages. He suggests a “task for sociolinguistics: to investigate the totality of relations that obtain between language and environment”. Two essays emphasize the inclusion of nonverbal phenomena in human communication, namely, Enninger/Haynes’ and Walburga von Raffler-Engel’s. Matthias Hartig tackles the history of the subject, mentioning Johann Andreas Schmeller, August Schleicher and Hermann Paul as predecessors. Although I am fond of some of Schleicher’s and Paul’s ideas, I think that we should look for the roots of ecolinguistics elsewhere, as, for instance, in Hugo Schuchardt and in Italian neolinguistics, among others. Schleicher departs from biology, considering language as an organism, not looked at from population genetics, as is done by Mufwene. That is to say, for Schleicher language is a thing, not a network of relationships.

The word ‘ecolinguistics’ was used in print for the second time in Hagège (1985: 328). According to this author, “a future ecolinguistics should investigate the way culturalized ‘natural’ references, such as the cardinal points, geographic particularities, human habitations, and cosmic elements are integrated in language”. According to him, Charles Nodier would have been the first “écologiste de la langue” around 1834. Some of the tasks he foresaw for ecolinguistics would be the relation between language and the physical world and ecology of languages. In 1987 there appeared Fill’s book Wörter zu Pflugscharen, in which he puts the ecological view of language in opposition to the traditional morphological one.

We could say that the 1990s are the years of the consolidation of ecolinguistics as a discipline. The first publication of this period in book form is Trampe (1990), who starts from a Sprache-Welt-System as does Finke (1996). In 1993, there appeared two books bearing the word ‘ecolinguistics’ in their titles, namely Fill (1993) and Makkai (1993). The former is the first systematic introduction to the discipline ever published. The latter is a collection of essays previously published, dealing with ecolinguistic matters. Apparently none of them knew about the other’s activities at that time.

Makkai’s book deals with several subjects such as the distinction between “exo-ecology” and “endo-ecology”. The latter includes “semo-ecology”, “eco-taxis”, “morpho-ecology”, “phono-ecology” (including “syllable-ecology”), and “lexo-ecology”. Unfortunately, Makkai did not present these concepts in a systematic way. They are scattered all along the book. However, in the two chapters dedicated to “pragmo-ecological grammar” we can see some suggestions of how to apply them. As to Fill (1993), we could say that this book laid the foundations for much of what has been practiced in the area. It is a reference book. Among the themes it discusses we could mention “language, humans, animals and plants”, “language and groups”, “language and conflict”, “etholinguistics” and “ecology of languages”.

In 1996 we have at least three other important publications. The first is the collection edited by Fill (1996) which contains the papers presented at the Klagenfurt Symposion (1995). It is the first collective publication in this area. The second is Boada (1996), which departs from the concept of ecosystem as a heuristic tool. He does not use the term ‘ecolinguistics’, but ‘eco-sociolinguistics’. The third publication of that year is Haarmann (1996). Building on Haugen, he emphasizes the role ecolinguistics can play in contact linguistics. From here on several publications have appeared, including Calvet (1999) and Couto (1999). The latter is a study of grammar formation in creolistics, starting from interaction.

In view of the several collective and individual publications that have appeared up to now we can say that ecolinguistics is consolidated as a field of research, although there are practitioners with several theoretical backgrounds. Among them we have applied linguists, philosophers, sociolinguists, creolists, discourse analysts and even ethnoscientists, as those gathered around the NGO TERRALINGUA.

5. Ecolinguistics today

Let us repeat: nowadays we can safely say that ecolinguistics is a well established discipline. This is in great part due to Alwin Fill’s efforts to develop it. He is a centripetal force in this endeavor. As noted above, he was the first to publish a book of introduction to the field. He has organized several meetings and edited some collective publications, beginning with Fill (1990). However, the first important event in the history of our discipline is probably the conference AILA IX in Saloniiki (1990), which Verhagen considered the “humble early beginnings”. In this conference, Halliday gave his seminal talk “New ways of meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics”. According to Fill, “at the same conference, the term ‘ecolinguistics’ was first introduced into the debate on language and ecology by a group of enthusiasts around Franz Verhagen” (AILA Review, 2000). By the way, this paper by Fill is based on his keynote speech given at the AILA XII, Tokyo, 1999. Kettemann and Penz (eds. 2000) is a collection of 23 essays in honor of Alwin Fill. Fill and Mühlhäusler (eds. 2001) is the first ecolinguistics reader. It contains at least three classics in the history of our discipline, among several other important papers, namely, Sapir (1963) “Language and environment”, Haugen (1972) “The ecology of language” and Halliday’s talk just mentioned.

The papers presented at some other events also became part of important publications. This is the case with those presented at the conference “30 Years of Language and Ecology” (Graz 2000) and the symposium “Sprache und Ökologie” (Passau 2001), which form the volume of Fill et al. (2002). The five sections of this book are representative of what had been done by then in the field. They are “The pillars of ecolinguistics” (6 essays), “Language contacts” (6 essays), “Eco-critical discourse analysis” (9 essays), “Dialectical ecolinguistics” (3 essays), and “Short contributions” (4 essays). The papers of the symposium held as part of the 2005 Austrian conference of linguists, with the title “Applied Linguistics”, were published in Fill and Penz (eds. 2007). At AILA X (Amsterdam, 1991), a Scientific Commission for Language and Ecology was set up as part of AILA.
It is important to note that among the most frequent researchers to be present in the meetings and anthologies are Peter Finke and Wilhelm Trampe. They are closely followed by Mühlhäusler, Yvonne Stork, Marieta Calderón and Adelaide Ferreira. Martin Döring has also organized some ecolinguistics’ events.

Everything that was said in the two previous paragraphs revolves around what we could call the Graz Group, with Alwin Fill as a leading figure. However, it is possible to detect other groups in other countries. One of them could be called the Odense Group, gathered around Jørgen Dørør and Jørgen Bang. They developed a special kind of ecolinguistics which they call dialectical linguistics. The name is due to the fact that they basically see language as interaction, or dialogue, not as an abstract system, because, as Coseriu once remarked, the system is in the communicative interaction, but not the other way round. Besides Dørør and Bang, the group also includes Sune Steffenson, Anna Linddr, Jeppe Bundsgaard, and Simon Simonsen. In Adelaide (Australia) there is a group comprising Peter Mühlhäusler and Joshua Nash among others. In Brasilia there are a few students of mine working on ecolinguistics subjects. Finally, we could mention the group formed around Luiza Maffi’s TERRALINGUA, which deals mainly with biological and cultural diversity. The latter includes linguistic diversity.

There are individual investigators of ecolinguistics’ subjects all over the world. In Barcelona, there is Albert Boada (and others); in Portugal, besides Adelaide C. Ferreira, there is Rui Ramos. In France, we could mention Louis-Jean Calvet, author of an important book on the ecology of the languages of the world (1999). In Chicago, we have Salikoko Mufwene, according to whom language is homologized to a parasitic or viral species, not to an organism (Mufwene, 2001).

There are further arguments in favor of the idea that ecolinguistics is a consolidated discipline. One of them is the fact that events associating language with ecology have taken place in countries other than those already mentioned as, for instance, the conference of the Italian Society of Linguistics (SIL) in Bergamo (2002), under the title of “Ecologia linguistica”. There are many ecolinguistics publications all over the world. They comprise books, such as Bang and Dørør (2007), Mühlhäusler (2003) and Couto (2009), as well as articles. Last but not least, several courses, seminars and lectures which deal with the subject have been given.

Taking a look at all the publications and activities mentioned above, we see that there are some preferred themes of investigation. The most frequent ones are criticism of the (pollutant) industries’ discourse, criticism of unecological vocabulary and even grammar. The latter type of study begins with Halliday’s talk. Andrew Goatly also dealt with it, although disagreeing with Halliday in details. Finally, there are those studies dedicated to epistemological questions. Among the latter we could mention those by Fill, Finke, Trampe, Dørør and Bang. The fact is that ecolinguistics is not a strictly consensus field of research, which is a positive side of it. As we will see in the next section, ecolinguistics is a lively field, encompassing researchers from several theoretical persuasions. What unifies them is the ecological point of view, as emphasized by Finke.

6. Ecolinguistics as a platform

Several linguists talk about an ecological paradigm, or ecological approach, beginning with Enninger and Haynes (1984), who considered it a productive one. According to Haarmann “Ökolinguistik ist kein Ersatz für Soziolinguistik, wohl aber ein Forschungsprinzip”. He added that through this principle “die methodologischen Grundlagen der Soziolinguistik bedeutend erweitert werden” (1996: 103).

Up until now, we have seen arguments in favor of ecology as a paradigm for the study of language (and social sciences). However, for some linguists, our discipline itself is, or should be, a paradigm in the study of language. Fill (2002: 15), for example, says that “only the existence of small and large entities (in this case language) together guarantees a dynamic interchange within environment”. This, he adds, “illustrates one of the many principles of the ecolinguistic paradigm”. This implies that ecolinguistics is a new way of doing linguistics, as can be seen in the famous talk by Halliday mentioned above.

The idea of ecolinguistics as a paradigm is shared by several ecolinguists, even when they talk in terms of transdisciplinary. In the abstract of his contribution to Fill et al. (2002), Trampe says that “it is not only possible but also necessary to complement the ‘paradigm’ of human ecology with an ecolinguistic perspective”, that is, an ecolinguistic paradigm. In other words, the idea of ecolinguistics as a paradigm for the study of language seems an appealing one.

In spite of what has just been said, there are investigators in the area who are not fond of the very idea of paradigm. Mak-kai (1993: 206), for instance, is skeptical of it, although he was thinking in the paradigm of generative grammar he has always criticized. However, he defends a “systematization of all…currents into a truly viable ECOLINGUISTICS”. One colleague who clearly and explicitly expresses himself against the idea of paradigm is Peter Finke. This is implicit in practically all his writings on ecolinguistic issues. For example, in Finke (2002), he says that “Nur ein nachhaltiges Wissen ist zukunftsfähig. Das Weltbild des logical point of view mit seinen Paradigmen, Fakultäten und Wissenschaftsministern ist dafür zu eng”. In the abstract of this essay it is stated that “thinking in paradigms must be overcome”. His contribution to Fill and Penz (2007) is basically dedicated to this thesis. However, in his essay in Kettermann and Penz (2000: 65), he says that “die ökolinguistischen Ideen sind mehr als eine neue Spezialisierung innerhalb der Linguistik; sie können der Sprachwissenschaft insgesamt neues Leben einhauchen”. If ecolinguistics can bring fresh ideas to the study of language it is, in a certain way, a model (paradigm) for this type of study (see, however, Finke, this volume).

As we have seen, the idea of paradigm is an appealing one, although some authors are skeptical about it. In other words, it is polemic. It could lead to what Mühlhäusler (2003: 36) formulated through the question: “What is not ecolinguistics?” This question implies the idea that ecolinguistics could be interpreted as an all-encompassing science, a super-science, a science of everything linguistic.
My proposal is that instead of paradigm we could talk in terms of platform. In this case, ecology could be a good platform for social and psychological sciences in general, i.e., human sciences, whereas ecolinguistics could be considered a platform for the study of language phenomena. In Couto (2007a,b), I suggested that ecolinguistics goes far beyond sociolinguistics and ecocritical discourse analysis. Even morphosyntactic, phonological and phonetic phenomena could be approached from an ecolinguistic point of view, as Makkai has suggested. Ecolinguistics as a platform would be like a launch-pad from which it is possible to take off in several directions. It would be a platform from which we study any language phenomena from a unified point of view.

As Fritjof Capra showed in his *The tao of physics*, classical mechanics is good for studying phenomena at a small scale, as closed systems. However, most systems leak, as Sapir had remarked, because they are open. For these open systems, the Newtonian model is inadequate. Language phenomena are a point in case. Therefore, if we accept this limitation of logical models and depart from ecolinguistics as a platform, we can study any language phenomena from a unified perspective. Acting this way, we could study a phoneme, without forgetting that it is part of a syllable, which is part of a morpheme, which is part of a word, which is part of a phrase, which is part of a language, which is part of the whole world. In other words, it is embedded in an immense network of relations.

A good example of a platform that works well can be seen in Arne Naess’ deep ecology. The Platform *Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement* formulated by him and George Sessions accommodate people from fields as diverse as Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism. The only prerequisite is to follow the basic principles of the platform. Our personal ideology, religion or taste do not matter much once we accept these principles, which are based on Spinoza and Gandhi.

7. Concluding remarks

Due to its origins, ecolinguistics is frequently associated with applied linguistics, especially among laypersons. As a matter of fact, Haugen’s talk of 1970 was given at a center for applied linguistics. AILA has always hosted sections on language and ecology, to the point of having a Steering Committee on Language and Ecology. The German Society of Applied Linguistics (GAL) has also hosted ecolinguistics in its meetings. The first person to talk about it in Brazil was the applied linguist Francisco Gomes de Matos in the newspaper *Jornal do comércio*, 12/5/1999 and later in “A case for ecolinguistic identity” (XXII. Internationale Deutschlehreretagung, Lucern, Switzerland, 2001). However, ecolinguistics is not a mere branch of applied linguistics. As we saw in the preceding section, it is a platform, from which we can study any kind of language phenomena from a unified point of view.

It is important to add some websites to the events, publications and other activities involving ecolinguistics mentioned above. The first of these was certainly www.kfuni-graz.at, organized by Alwin Fill. A second one is www.ecoling.net, by Arran Stibbe. It includes the journal *Language & Ecology Online Magazine*. Lately, a discussion group on the internet has been established, namely *Ecolinguistics List*, moderated by Arran Stibbe.

Ecolinguistics is by no means the only and, above all, not even the first, human science to use ecology as a source of its concepts. In Geography, this has been done since the beginning of the 20th century and, perhaps, even the end of the 19th, as can be seen in Friedrich Ratzel’s anthropo-geography as well as in his follower Ellen Semple. In anthropology, Julian Steward investigated cultural ecology. According to him, the environment influences culture. In this domain, we could include what has been done in the ethnosciences, such as, for instance, the work of many anthropologists and ecologists gathered around TERRALINGUA (the ecolinguist Mühlhäusler collaborated with them). In sociology, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess have investigated “urban ecology” since the 1920s. They approached a city’s social problems from the optics of its spatial configuration, in concentric circles. Riley E. Dunlap and William R. Catton Jr. not only envisaged an environmental sociology, but considered the ecological paradigm a good starting-point for the social sciences. In psychology, the name that first comes to mind is Theodore Roszak, among others. Ecosemiotics is being developed by Winfried Nöth, *inter alia*. Some ecolinguists are of the opinion that we should think in terms of sign ecology in general, not only of language ecology. In literary studies, we have ecocriticism with representatives in several countries.

Practically every social science has an eco-version. Today there is even an eco-architecture. However, practically all of its adherents are well aware that the ecological approach is not bound to have the enthusiastic approval of academics. In spite of that, they go on in this line of research because they are convinced that, in Døør’s and Bang’s terms, it is a healthy way of doing science. This is certainly the case with ecolinguistics.

References
