



ENTREVISTA COM ECOLINGUISTAS

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Brief Presentation

Alwin Frank Fill is Professor Emeritus of English at Graz University (Austria). He studied English and Latin at the University of Innsbruck and undertook further studies at Queen's College (University of Oxford, UK) and at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, USA). His main research interests are ecolinguistics, language and suspense, the impact of language and linguistics for kids. He has published books on all these topics, most recently *The language impact: evolution, system, discourse* (2010) and *Kinder- und Jugendlinguistik* (2014). His books on ecolinguistics include *The ecolinguistics reader* (ed. with P. Mühlhäusler, 2001) and *Sustaining language: Essays in Applied Ecolinguistics* (ed. with Hermine Penz, 2007). Einar Haugen is justly considered the "father" of ecolinguistics, but he who kicked off its spread all over the world was Alwin Fill. In regard to Brazilian Ecolinguistics, he sent some Introductory Words to be read at the I EBE (1st Brazilian Meeting on Ecolinguistics, University of Brasília, 2012), which were published with a selection of the papers presented in *Cadernos de linguagem e sociedade* v. 13, n. 1, 2013, available in paper and at <http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/les/issue/view/833> His second collaboration was the Preface he wrote for the book containing the papers presented during the meeting "10 Years of Ecolinguistics in Brazil" (Campinas: Pontes, 2017). He has papers in at least three other Brazilian publications. Finally, he attended the IV EBE (4th Brazilian Meeting on Ecolinguistics, held at the Federal University of Fortaleza, Brazil, in June 25-27, 2018, as a key-note speaker. He had a very active participation in this event.

Breve Apresentação

Allwin Frank Fill é Professor Emérito de Inglês na Universidade de Graz (Áustria). Ele estudou Inglês e Latim na Universidade de Innsbruck e fez os demais estudos no Queen's College (Universidade de Oxford, RU) e na Universidade de Michigan (Ann Arbor, EUA). Suas principais áreas de interesse são ecolinguística, língua e suspense, o impacto da língua e linguística para crianças. Ele publicou livros sobre todos esses tópicos, sendo o mais recente *The language impact: evolution, system, discourse* (2010) e *Kinder- und Jugendlinguistik* (2014) (Linguística para as crianças e para a juventude). Seus livros sobre ecolinguística incluem *The ecolinguistics reader* (org. com P. Mühlhäusler, 2001) and *Sustaining language: Essays in Applied Ecolinguistics* (org. com Hermine Penz, 2007). Se Einar Haugen é com justiça considerado o "pai" da ecolinguística, quem deu o pontapé inicial na propagação da disciplina em todo o mundo foi Alwin Fill. No que tange à ecolinguística brasileira, ele enviou umas Introductory Words (Palavras Iniciais) que foram lidas durante o I EBE, na UnB, em 2012. Elas foram publicadas com uma seleção das comunicações em *Cadernos de linguagem e sociedade* v. 14, n. 1, 2012, disponíveis em papel e em <http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/les/issue/view/833> Sua segunda

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colaboração foi o Prefácio que escreveu para o livro comemorativo dos "10 Anos de Ecolinguística no Brasil" (Campinas: Pontes, 2017). Fill tem ensaios em pelo menos mais umas três publicações brasileiras. Finalmente, ele participou do IV EBE (UFC, Fortaleza, 25-27 de junho de 2018) com a palestra de abertura. Fill teve uma participação bastante ativa no evento.

Interview

- **ECO-REBEL:** Professor Fill, how did you come to Ecolinguistics? Does it have to do with your previous activity in Applied Linguistics?

Alwin Fill: Yes, but not just that. I read Benjamin Lee Whorf's book *Language, Thought and Reality* (ed. J. B. Carroll) in the late 1960's, when I was about 28 years of age and began to realize the power of language. I had already finished my doctoral dissertation, which was about William Somerset Maugham, in other words, about a literary topic. My experience in the Austrian Alps dates back to the early 1960's, when I was making ski tours in the Tyrolean mountains. In the late sixties, several ski tours became uninteresting, because lifts were being built up the mountains ("the mountains were developed/opened up", in German "erschlossen"). In 1971 I founded the Tyrolean Alpine Protection Club, of which I was president as long as I was in Innsbruck. When I went to Graz (1980), someone else took over the presidency. The Alpine Protection Club had some successes; it still exists. I became angry about the felling of trees to make ski runs and to build lifts up the mountains, which was euphemized by calling it 'mountain development'. Thus, I began to think about the role of language in the destruction of nature, and I even founded an 'Alpine protection Club'. I began to give talks about this and to write about it in Austrian journals. It was probably Norman Denison (then professor of linguistics at the University of Graz), who suggested to me writing about this topic by using the term 'ecological linguistics'.

- EC: How would you define Ecolinguistics? Is the definition given in Fill (1993: p. 4) still valid? Would you add anything to it?

- AF: On the whole, I still agree with this definition. Perhaps I would add that ecolinguistics does not just study interaction, but that language itself is interaction (do Couto, 2017: 149).

- EC: In Fill (1987: *Wörter zu Pflugscharen*) you said that the study of language structure (which you called "morphological") was relatively well done already and that from then (1987) on Linguistics should look at language from an ecological view. What did you mean with "ecological view" (*ökologische Betrachtungsweise*)?

AF: When writing that book (1987: p. 11), I saw an ecological view of language as investigating linguistic aspects of peace and conflict as well as the role of language in the relation between humans and nature. Today, I would add all topics connected with the interrelation between languages and the mutual impact they have on each other.

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- EC: The physicist-turned-ecologist Fritjof Capra also talks about an "ecological view of the world". Does his view have any affinity with yours? What you said in *Wörter zu Pflugscharen* seems to imply the exclusion of "morphological" questions.

AF: To have an "ecological view of the world" is one of my aims, which I have not yet fully attained. By excluding "morphological" questions, I meant questions of language structure and the question of "correct" or "incorrect" use of language, which I do not consider to be ecological. I totally agree with Fritjof Capra when he suggests teaching young people "ecoliteracy", i.e. awareness of ecological problems and the role language plays in creating this awareness.

- EC: If Ecolinguistics were to follow the ideas put forward by Edward Sapir (1884-1939) in his famous essay "Language and environment" (1911) would it have to investigate only the relationships between language and the world (reference, description etc.)?

AF: I do not think so, because Sapir in his essay discusses a great number of native American languages (e.g. Kwakiutl, Nootka, Salish, Tsimshian etc.) and shows how differently these languages express, say, activities taking place on the beach from our 'SAE' languages. He also mentions some differences between these 'Aboriginal American' languages. Thus Sapir also expresses thoughts concerning language interaction which could later be found in the Voegelins' and Haugen's publications of the 1960's and 1970's.

- EC: Would Claude Hagège's (1985: 328) proposal go in the same direction?

AF: Claude Hagège wrote about the monocultural linguistic policies of the French Revolution, which wanted to do away with dialects, which were considered barriers to free commerce. Hagège (1985: 203) calls Charles Nodier, who in 1834 criticized this linguistic centralization, the first ecologist of language (cf. do Couto, 2017: 150). This is in keeping with modern Ecolinguistics, although in later sections of his book, Hagège has a different conception of Ecolinguistics from our modern one. As far as I remember, for him Ecolinguistics should investigate how geographical particularities, human accommodation/housing and elements of the cosmos are integrated into language (German edition, p. 256). This does not sound like modern Ecolinguistics.

- EC: What about Einar Haugen's (1972) agenda for a future and then not-yet-named Ecolinguistics?

AF: In Haugen's 10 "ecological questions" (at the end of his paper), he mentions a great number of topics which a future Ecology of language could deal with. Among these are the 'classification' of a language in relation to other languages; the 'domains of use' of a language, its 'internal varieties', 'concurrent languages', 'written tradition' etc. It is a little surprising to me that he asks these questions "for any given language", and only the last question (10) is really ecological since it asks "where the language stands and where it is going in comparison with the other languages [!] of the world."

-EC: What do you think about Peter Finke's position? As far as I know, he looks at language phenomena from a holistic perspective, and from an ecosystemic perspective.

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AF: Peter Finke no longer sees Ecolinguistics as a discipline of linguistics, but (on the meta-level) he asks the question “What is the impact of Ecolinguistics on the human mind and consequently on human action concerning Nature and Culture?” For him, the “disciplinary age is ending”, and Ecolinguistics may well lead to “abandoning the ivory tower of isolated disciplines” (Finke, 2017: 408) and be a pacemaker towards a transdisciplinary future. Finke takes an ecosystemic perspective in so far as he writes that “ecological systems not only exist in the natural environment, but also in cultural, social and psychic environments” (ibid.). He also deplores the use of (American) English as the *lingua franca* of science and thus agrees with Phillipson’s critique of ‘language imperialism’.

-EC: In other words, do you still think that Ecolinguistics should restrict itself to questions of environmentalism, minorities, growthism, anthropocentrism and similar subjects?

AF: I no longer think so: following Finke, Ecolinguistics will more and more move on to the meta-level, where also Gregory Bateson’s “ecology of mind” will be one of its topics, which says that “evolution did not stop with the development of physical ecological structures”, but is also taking place in the psychic dimension of the world (Finke, 2017: 409).

-EC: If the answer to the previous question is affirmative, don't you think that those subjects could just as well be dealt with by sociologists, philosophers (deep ecology), journalists, literary critics and so on?

AF: Not really, because they would deal with them from their disciplinary perspectives, whereas Ecolinguistics brings in the transdisciplinary dimension concerning all these topics.

-EC: For example, someone who uses Norman Fairclough's theory (or a similar model) to analyse texts-discourses that have to do with environmentalism – or the the other questions pointed out above – is he doing Ecolinguistics? Could Ecolinguistics be defined only by the object of study?

AF: Personally, I do not think that Norman Fairclough’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis could deal with environmental texts in any way ecologically. Among the questions he asks concerning the lexical level, the level of grammar and the textual level, there may be one or two which could be applied to environmental texts (e.g. “Are there euphemistic expressions?”), but nearly all the others are only meant to show how texts and their authors exert power over us. Ecolinguistics cannot be defined only by the object of study, but rather by the systemic world-view behind it, viz. interaction in an ecosystem and maintaining diversity.

-EC: If a specialist in any social science can do the job, wouldn't Ecolinguistics be unnecessary, as Joshua Nash once asked?

AF: The transdisciplinary dimension that Ecolinguistics brings in is something that no social scientist could equalize. To my mind, Ecolinguistics will never be unnecessary, but will become more and more important, since it tries to answer the question “Do linguistic

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patterns affect the survival and wellbeing of the human species as well as of other species on Earth?"

-EC: In the Brazilian version of Ecolinguistics (Ecosystemic Linguistics), ecological terms are not used as mere metaphors; they are taken literally, beginning with "linguistic/language ecosystem", which contains all the ingredients of biological ecosystem, as can be seen in Couto's contribution to the monumental *The Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics* you edited with Hermine Penz. We do Linguistic Ecology (*Sprachökologie, Ökologie der Sprache*), not only Ecological Linguistics (*ökologische Linguistik*). Do you think this is too far-fetched, too "biological"?

AF: Ecosystemic Linguistics does not seem to me to be too "biological". On the contrary, it comprises practically all topics dealt with by other ecolinguistic approaches. It makes a distinction between Exoecology and Endoecology of Language. While Exoecology of Language studies the topics dealt with by other ecolinguists (including myself), Endoecology of Language opens up a new field by studying syntax, morphology, semantics, phonology and lexicology from an ecological point-of-view. Ecosystemic Linguistics sees all these areas as "organic networks of relationships" (do Couto, 2017: p. 158). I see Ecosystemic Linguistics as one of the "future horizons" of Ecolinguistics.

-EC: Or should we use only ecological-philosophical concepts, for instance, the ones of deep ecology?

AF: I do not think so. I am not an adherent of deep ecology. Using only eco-philosophical concepts would make ecolinguistics an area of philosophy and would take away its relation to problems of the real world.

-EC: What future do you see for Ecolinguistics in the years to come?

AF: Ecolinguistics will deal with new topics such as text-image combinations, films and TV programs, but its most important future will be (1) to investigate the ecological relation between Ecolinguistics itself and its effect on human thought and action, which could be said to form a new 'ecosystem', and (2) its influence on political and economic decisions. Ecolinguistics could thus become a science which creates peace through language – in the sense of Francisco Gomes de Matos.

-EC: What about countries like Brazil, China, Indonesia and Iran, where Ecolinguistics is emerging with great strength?

AF: Brazil is already in the front row of ecolinguistics, and China is developing its own 'school' of Ecolinguistics, which takes in ideas of Daoism. China (with its many languages and its environmental problems) is a country in which Ecolinguistics should (and will) play a particularly important role. I have not yet followed the development of Ecolinguistics in Indonesia and Iran, but I am sure these and other countries will also one day be part of the "ecolinguistic community".

-EC: Since you took part in the IV EBE (4th Brazilian Meeting on Ecolinguistics) in June/2018, what is your opinion about Ecosystemic Linguistics?

AF: Modern Ecosystemic Linguistics was founded and will be further developed by a Brazilian scholar (do Couto) and will play a more and more important role. However, I did not have the impression that all Brazilian ecolinguists taking part in the IV EBE were ecosystemic linguists. The topics dealt with by them showed a very wide spectrum, although it would perhaps be possible to bring them together in Ecosystemic Linguistics.

-EC: Further, what is your opinion about what is being done by Brazilian ecolinguists in general?

AF: Their topics are manifold, and their fascination by Ecolinguistics impressed me very much. Considering that Ecolinguistics has been studied in Brazil for now eleven years, the achievement of the founders of Brazilian Ecolinguistics is astonishing. I am really looking forward to future developments there. Brazil may become the country with the largest number of ecolinguists in the world.

-EC: Would you like to add anything that was not contemplated in the previous questions? Please, feel free to add questions that were not asked above.

AF: The questions were very comprehensive, but there is an additional question that I sometimes ask myself. Who were the real initiators of ecological thinking before the 20th century? Were the Humboldt brothers the first to have ecological ideas (concerning language), or were there thinkers in Antiquity, e.g. in Greek and Roman philosophy, who already thought in terms of interrelation and interaction in what was later called an Ecosystem? Zenon (writes about *oikeiosis!*), Socrates (in the Platonic dialogues) and perhaps Seneca are the ones that come to mind. However, I have not yet found an answer to this question.

- EC: Thank you very much, professor Fill, for your kind contribution.

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