



ENTREVISTA COM ECOLINGUISTAS

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Breve apresentação/Brief presentation

O professor Peter Mühlhäusler é aposentado como Foundation Professor of Linguistics da Universidade de Adelaide, Austrália. Alemão de nascimento, estudou em Stellenbosch, Reading e na Australian National University. Lecionou na Universidade de Oxford. Suas principais áreas de interesse são: línguas crioulas e pidgins, línguas indígenas da Austrália, gramática dos pronomes e ecolinguística. Mühlhäusler é autor de um dos primeiros manuais de introdução à crioulística (*Pidgin and creole linguistics*, 1986), de dois dos primeiros livros sobre língua e meio ambiente: *Greenspeak: A study of environmental discourse* (1999), juntamente com Rom Harré e Jens Brockmeier, e *Language of environment - Environment of language: A course in ecolinguistics*, 2003). É coautor (com Stephen Wurm e Tyron Darrell) do monumental *Atlas of Languages of Intercultural Communication in the Pacific, Asia, and the Americas* (1996). Tem colaborado com grande parte das coletâneas de crioulística/pidginística e de ecolinguística. Ele está presente na grande antologia de ecolinguística organizada por Alwin Fill e Hermine Penz, intitulada *Handbook of ecolinguistics* (Routledge, 2017). ECO-REBEL já publicou dois artigos dele, em tradução portuguesa. Devido a suas pesquisas de campo nas ilhas de Norfolk, tem contribuído também com as etnociências, mais especificamente, com a etnoecologia linguística, ou seja, o estudo dos nomes para espécimes da flora e da fauna em comunidades tradicionais.

Entrevista/Interview

ECO-REBEL: Professor Mühlhäusler, how did you come to Ecolinguistics? Does it have anything to do with your previous studies in Creolistics?

Peter Mühlhäusler: One of my early influences was Sapir's article on Language and Environment and my experience with Language Planning for Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea. Tok Pisin was selected as one of the National Languages but there was a mismatch between its expressive power (mainly its lexical resources) and the requirements of the new society that was emerging. In times of rapid social and technological change such a mismatch can be expected. I observed that Western languages exhibited a similar mismatch in the area of Talking about environmental issues and I started collecting observations in the mid-1970s and publishing on this topic in the early 1980s. The special importance of pidgins and creoles lies in the fact that they are young, rapidly developing languages, spoken typically by populations that are recent migrants. It is easier to study principles of development with such languages than old large languages. My work on Pitkern and Norfolk has enabled me to do a lot of empirical ecolinguistics.

EC: How would you define Ecolinguistics?

PM: Definitions have no truth value but are either useful or useless. Ecolinguistics is concerned with the relationship/interactions between languages and ways of speaking and the social and natural world in which humans communicate. At times the world impacts on language, at other times language creates perceptions of and actions that impact on the world. There are also

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circumstances in which there is no mutual influence. Ecolinguistics should seek to document and understand the interactions.

I am not sure whether such understanding can solve environmental problems and I am worried that much of ecolinguistics is focussed on moral issues of the kind embraced by the green political left. The mass of environmentally sensitive language appears to have done little to arrest environmental decline and greenspeaking often becomes a substitute for action (as I argued in my book with Rom Harré and Jens Brockmeyer).

EC: Do you think that Ecolinguistics may be used as a framework for some kind of creole investigation?

PM: My principal question is how languages adapt to new ecological circumstances. Creoles, as observed above, are particularly useful for doing this.

EC: What do you think about the idea of an "ecological view of the world" as applied to the analysis of language phenomena?

PM: An ecological view emphasizes interconnections and interrelationships as well as the important role of diversity. Languages are not self-contained entities and one cannot understand them without having looked at wider ecological connections. Languages are not an entity surrounded by an environment but integrated with it. One of the very few linguistic approaches that acknowledges this is integrational linguistics as developed by Roy Harris and his Oxford colleagues (I was one of them) and students.

EC: Do you agree with the idea that Ecolinguistics must look at its object from a holistic point of view?

PM: Yes and no. A holistic perspective is required but languages are not objects 'out there'. Identifying an 'object' of ecolinguistics would involve turning activities and processes into a static entity by means of a reification metaphor. Ontologically, ecological phenomena are a highly mixed bunch (objects that exist without human agency or existence, discursively created objects and, the most tricky of the lot, objects brought into being by the interactions of natural and historical factors). It may be desirable to have a wholistic approach, but in the absence of any clear understanding what the whole actually is, the best we can do is to enlarge the number of parameters we consider - an indefinitely large number, many of them beyond our comprehension.

EC: Would you exclude "structural" phenomena from the Ecolinguistics' object of study? Why?

PM: No as long as one does not confuse structure with descriptive accounts of structure and does not equate structure with a closed system.

EC: Or do you think that Ecolinguistics must be restricted to the study of environmental questions, minorities, growthism and similar questions?

PM: No

EC: Don't you think that these questions could just as well be approached from the sociological, philosophical, literary etc. point of view, in which case Ecolinguistics would be unnecessary?

PM: Probably not - language free economics, physics, biology, history and other disciplines are of very limited use. All of our worlds are contaminated by language, my colleague Edwin Ardener once said. Conversely, the world contaminates all language.

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EC: If one uses Norman Fairclough's (or other 'analysis of discourse' model) in the analysis of environmental questions, are we doing Ecolinguistics? Why?

PM: Ecolinguistics needs many tools. Fairclough's approach is one of them. Its efficacy remains to be demonstrated.

EC: Is it valid for Ecolinguistics to use categories of biological Ecology since it begins with the prefix "eco-"? If yes, all of them or only some of them? Which ones, for example? Or should it use only philosophical ecology's (deep ecology, for instance) and sociological ecology's concepts (sustainability, long-term view etc.)?

PM: These are other tools, again without proof of their ultimate efficacy.

EC: Do you see any difference between "*Sprachökologie*" (*language ecology*), in which the noun is "ecology", and "*ökologische Linguistik*" (*ecological linguistics*), where the noun is "linguistics"? Do you agree with one or the other of these positions? Or do you think we should see them dialectically?

PM: They are complementary approaches in need of supplementation by other approaches.

EC: Which future do you see for Ecolinguistics in the world?

PM: I am worried about the lack of rigour and empirical work and attempts to put ecolinguistics on the moral highground. My understanding is that researchers should be concerned with Truth in the Greek sense of *aletheia* - that which is not hidden. Our task is to remove the layers of untruth (ideology, power games, misunderstandings, errors, etc) that hide the truth. Ecolinguists may 'discover' things they do not feel comfortable with. We must be prepared to change our conclusions rather than hiding in a critical mass of practitioners belonging to a 'school'.

EC: What about countries like Brazil and China where it is beginning to thrive?

PM: These countries should seek to think about their issues rather than take over a pre-fabricated approach to ecolinguistics.

EC: Finally, it is well known that you pay much attention to the lexicon in your investigations. Why?

PM: I have written about the lexicon, grammar and discourses. The lexicon caters for concepts (generalities) and is a good point of departure for talking about referential adequacy. Grammar is a means of expressing singularities, whilst discourses enable the establishment of interconnections between generalities and singularities. They all have their place in ecolinguistic studies.

EC: Would you like to add anything else?

PM: I was never in favour of having hyphenated subbranches of linguistics like psycho – and socio-linguistics and fear that the label eco-linguistics may marginalize the approach. The point is: speaking and making sense are literally (not metaphorically, ecological phenomena. I prefer for ecolinguistics to be called linguistics. Whilst doing academic work I have always worked on the land, kept animals and tried to become accepted into the communities I work with. (In the

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case of the Wirangu people of South Australia it meant eating wombat). I grew up among the hunters, farmers and woodmen of my Alemannic homeland and admire the way they cared for their natural environment without a need for metalinguistic reflection. Doing ecolinguistic work requires doing work out in the world, not just armchair reflection.

EC: Thank you very much, professor Mühlhäusler.

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