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STUDYING THE ECONOMIZATION OF DISCOURSE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE FOR ECOLINGUISTICS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to serve as an interdisciplinary methodological proposal which aims to enrich the critical, constructivist and interpretivist schools of International Relations. It builds on the already existing, although still modest tradition of using discourse analysis in IR.

Methodology/approach: The methodology proposed is the combination of the interpretivist method with ecolinguistics. The inclusion of this innovative linguistic school provides an avenue of research that is both critical, ecological (or even eco-radical) and focused on language and its role in shaping both international politics and the world at large. The article contains a short introduction to ecolinguistics for IR scholars and tries to showcase its potential usefulness for analyzing different IR discourses.

Findings: The article is supplemented by a short empirical case study that shows the viability of using basic ecolinguistics in IR discourse analysis. The study is focused on the phenomenon of increasing economization of mainstream discourse on international affairs and uses the example of IR think tanks. Ecolinguistics are thereby applied to the narratives on the Paris Agreement published by chosen European think tanks in 2015 and 2016. The findings confirm both the economization of discourse on the matters of global political ecology as well as the usefulness of ecolinguistics in revealing this phenomenon.

Originality/value: The article is among the first syntheses of IR and ecolinguistics, which may prove relevant to many fields of international studies, with the most obvious one being

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political ecology. The proposed methodology will be useful to scholars representing critical, constructivist, “green” and ecofeminist approaches to studying IR.

Keywords: critical theory; green theory; international relations; ecolinguistics; discourse analysis; economization; constructivism; interpretivism

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary mainstream discourse on International Relations (IR) has many faults, especially in view of its inability to tackle the environmental crisis (Burke et al., 2016) and when discussed on the grounds of a critical ecosophy (Guattari, 2000). One of the reasons for this seems to be the fact that it has in large part become colonized by the science of economics and adopted a noticeably econo-centric worldview. By assuming an eco-critical stance towards the discipline of IR itself and the discourses that it reproduces through numerous discursive chains, one can try to unveil this phenomenon and explain its socio-ecological impacts. This is because language, as a socio-ecological phenomenon, is inherently tied to both the socio-political and the biological, while the manner of its use can influence humans’ attitude towards the rest of nature (Steciag, 2012).

The article is a theoretical-methodological proposal that strives to enrich the critical, constructivist and interpretive scholarship in the discipline of IR. It is aimed at researchers interested in environmental politics or broader ecological issues, who feel the lack of a concrete “green” paradigm of IR with its structured framework of research methods. However, the article does not provide such a paradigm/theory. The interdisciplinary synthesis with ecolinguistics introduced in the article is not a theory of power, conflict, peace etc. It is nonetheless a discrete method aimed at studying the discourse of IR through an ecological lens and from a reflective and interpretive stance inherent to all critical studies.

The critical theory of IR was adopted here as the basis of all theorizing because of its features, best described by Price and Reus-Smit (1998). Firstly, on the epistemological level, it contests the positivist and empiricist stance towards knowledge. This is extremely important for any reflective and self-critical analysis of discourse, because one must first acknowledge the subjectivity of every use and every interpretation of language. Secondly, critical theory is methodologically pluralistic and among all perspectives in IR it lends itself best to interpretative studies. Thirdly, it eschews the rationalistic view of human nature and activity, which allows it to uncover ideological grounds of knowledge and discourse production. This allows for its synthesis with any critical discourse analysis. Lastly, it rejects the very possibility of normatively neutral research, calling for science to unveil and collapse the structures of domination – this is exactly what critical discourse analysis and ecolinguistics strive for as well. It is only a matter of convention whether one includes the whole of nature into the category of the ‘oppressed’ (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002).

The structure of the article corresponds to its broader aim. It begins with a short meta-theoretical study of the place of discourse analysis and interpretation in IR, as well as their relation to the ecological aspects of both research and politics. After that, a concise summary of ecolinguistics as a method of critical discourse analysis is given while epistemologically justifying its use together with the critical theory of IR. Then, the titular problem of economization is discussed through the critical and ecolinguistic lens while being related to the discourse on

IR. Lastly, a simple case study is presented in order to showcase the operationalization of critical ecolinguistics of a chosen discourse on international affairs. This example analyzes a small set of narratives of European think tanks about the Paris Agreement from 2015–2016, as it exemplifies how IR analysts construct their discourse on environmental issues.

2. DISCOURSE, INTERPRETATION AND NATURE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Discourse can certainly be both a subject of study and an analytical category in IR, because it is so in political science as a parent discipline (Laska, 2011). It does require a noticeable degree of interdisciplinarity but – when done with a solid theoretical base and in a methodologically sound way – allows to form totally new perspectives and ways of talking not only about the world, but also about the discipline of IR itself. One must treat discourse as one of the dimensions of politics and not limit the research to texts only but find out how they relate to broader concepts of political science – or the science of IR – including paradigms, theories, categories, etc. After all, language itself is political and both the use of language and political behavior are closely intertwined (Chilton, 2004).

Language has often been avoided within disciplinary debates in IR, and when it was approached it was done in various ways (Fierke, 2002). The avoidance of language and discourse stemmed mostly from the positivist orthodoxy which began with neorealism and continues to dominate the methodology of IR. According to Fierke (2002), even the birth of constructivism and the inclusion of ‘the social’ into the ontology of the discipline did not change much in way of incorporating discourse as a subject of study. As such, the conceptual and methodological framework of the discipline had remained rather stagnant (Ferguson & Mansbach, 2004; Dyduch, Mikiewicz & Rzeszotko, 2006; Jackson, 2011; Polus, 2013). However, the linguistic turn in philosophy from the first half of the 20th century did make its way into political science after a while (Laska, 2011) and eventually into IR itself (Fierke, 2002), although it still occupies the fringes of the discipline. This is because it is still mostly tied to poststructuralist perspectives which are shunned by the (neo)positivist and rationalist mainstream (Jackson, 2011). Even constructivists have kept a safe distance from language, focusing instead on norms and meanings (Fierke, 2002), although the latter was at least a small step into the linguistic direction.

Nevertheless, the raising interest in language in IR fits into the ‘interpretive turn’ (Kurowska, 2020). It is an agenda of more contextual, reflexive, granular and practice-oriented research that deals with meanings and meaning-making practices. Kurowska (2020) talks about ‘the web of meaning’ that underlines IR as a whole and it seems prudent to include nature, ecology or environment among those meanings. These should be interpreted in order to understand their role in social practice along more traditional categories. Not much research has been done in IR combining the interest in language and meanings with an ecological perspective. Such an approach is bound to be rare, because any environmental research is still marginal in the discipline. As proven by Green and Hale (2017), only a fraction of scientists incorporate the environment in their IR research. Even less use any kind of constructivist or interpretivist approach. And an attempt to combine ecolinguistics with the study of IR has probably never been done.

Studying and explaining the representations of nature in the language of law and politics is not easy (Delaney, 2003). It requires a constructivist lens and acknowledgment that 'nature' is a social construct adapted to concepts of recognition, explanation and control. According to Delaney (2003), all categories – 'nature', 'ecology', 'environment', etc. – are politicized and their usage in language has an ideological aspect that we cannot ignore. What is important is that the language of science is not free of this problem and neither are peripheral languages that are based on it. The ways in which nature is framed in science flows into other discourses, i.e., the expertise discourse of think tank analysts or media discourses. After all, scientific discourse – including the discourse of IR as a science and analytic perspective – is one of the tools designed for and by causative forces and actors (i.e., states, corporations, militaries) to better divide, control and manage the world (Harding, 1996). This is visible in the geo-managerialist role of the capitalist state described by Moore (2018), which is the geopolitical realization of capitalism's co-production and organization of nature (Moore, 2015).

In order to study politics, language and nature together it is prudent to adopt Harvey's (1996) thesis that every socio-political project in human history has also been an ecological project and *vice versa*. Thus, every critical study of society and its constructs is also a critical study of its relation with nature. Therefore, if the grandest project of humanity – the world order with its globalized economy – is also an ecological project, we must understand the language we use to describe and explain it in the field of IR. It requires a critical reflection and a conscious confrontation with the traditional semiotic system in order to understand how it relates to the bigger picture of language-nature relations. Such perspective can be achieved by using a critical theory of IR – according to the requirements introduced by Cox (1981). It is also necessary to follow the insights of Walker (1993), who sees the theory of international relations as a discourse that is tightly connected to the modern capitalist state. As such, the whole discipline – and by extension the whole scientifically informed discourse on international affairs, including that of experts and analysts – sets a discursive framework of limits and threats, including those that pertain to everything ecological. Thus, the world order with all its ecological problems is both the subject of study in IR as well as its product (Laferrière & Stoett, 1999). Ignoring the ecological aspect is a subjective and normative decision made by every researcher independently.

That a critical approach to IR is the only one that can be synthesized with a radical ecological perspective was proven by Laferrière and Stoett (1999), who recognized its emancipative potential. It alone allows one to discern the nuances of relations between agents and structures, to achieve true methodological holism, but also to be constructive in proposing alternative visions of the world. They claim that critical IR theory has a "close affinity to radical ecology" (Laferrière & Stoett, 1999, p. 156) and is the only popular perspective that allows an incorporation of a real ecosophy. Both intellectual movements have a postpositivist inclination and similar convictions about change. This is conducive to the appearance of new ways of "greening" constructivism (Maslow & Nakamura, 2008) and the critical theory of IR (Walewicz, 2019). On the other side of science, the case for critical environmental studies is also only getting stronger (Wapner, 2008). This is one of the reasons why ecolinguistics, as a radically ecological research method, fits well into the critical strand of IR. Another reason is not epistemological but normative – both critical IR theory and ecolinguistics strive to provide alternatives to the existing order based on ethics of (real) sustainability, socio-ecological justice and ecosystem harmony (O'Neill, 2009). Both are also rather critical of capitalism or at least its worst, most environmentally-destructive aspects.

3. ECOLINGUISTICS AND THE RELATION OF LANGUAGE, WORLD POLITICS AND NATURE

The language that we use to describe world order is, like any human language, informed by our physical and biological environment and its rules of survival (Stibbe, 2012). And *vice versa* – that language impacts the environment through our social practices, including international law and institutions, trade agreements and market regulation, and most directly through our environmental legislation, with the most important laws being passed at an international level. As Stibbe (2012, p. 413) writes: “ecolinguistics provides an important dimension for studies of language and globalization because it encompasses the globe, or rather the biosphere” – which are both the main subjects of research in IR. Or at least they should be according to Cox (1992), who insists that we should study the world order as a framework consisting of three components: the global political economy, the interstate system, and – importantly – the biosphere. Moreover, because Harvey (1996, p. 173) describes any critical research of capitalist modernity as “no trivial political task”, it is imperative to acknowledge the political nature of the science of IR itself. This can be achieved by adopting a critical perspective on the discipline itself. Such perspective enables the use of any critical discourse analysis and – by extension – ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2014).

To give a short summary of ecolinguistics, one should begin with its distinctive features as described by Sujecka-Zajac (2020). The foremost feature is methodological holism, which means that when studying language or discourse through an ecolinguistic lens, one has to take into account all possible conditions – personal, situational, cultural, social and environmental or biophysical. It is also ontologically monistic in that it assumes no distinction between humanity and nature – there are only human and nonhuman natures at most. As such, it exhibits the basic assumptions of radical ecosophy – including deep ecology (Naess, 1973), social ecology (Bookchin, 1982) and other ecosophies (Guattari, 2000) – not only as an ethical stance but also as an acknowledgment of the insights from natural sciences about the interconnectivity of each component of the web of life (Stibbe, 2014). Thus, ecolinguistics gives voice to the oppressed, dominated and exploited – not only social groups but also all living beings and future generations. It is also quite critical of many of the ‘commonsensical’ presuppositions of capitalism, including the primacy of growth.

One of the important aspects of ecolinguistics is its normativity, which needs to be understood properly. What makes the critical theory of IR the only framework that can incorporate ecolinguistics is the goal-oriented activism of the latter (Stibbe, 2012) and its propensity for eco-ethical judgments. Ideologies, worldviews and values revealed in the analyzed discourse are neither ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but they can be compatible or incompatible with the ecosophical stance of the analyst. By extension, they can be compatible or incompatible with a certain vision of sustainability and intra-nature relations. This is why Stibbe (2015) separates beneficial, ambivalent and destructive discourses, which are measured against a specific ecosophy based on valuing life, well-being, respecting the future generations of all animals, working within environmental limits and adhering to social and environmental justice. Destructive discourses promote overconsumption, disregard the finiteness of the planet, reproduce individualistic and egoistic behaviors, legitimize the separation of humanity and nature and the exploitative domination over the latter. Beneficial discourses are the ones that adhere to the ecosophical principles that underline ecolinguistics itself. Ambivalent discourses on the other

hand contain some aspects which align with ecosophy and some that run counter to it, so they can be used differently in different contexts (Stibbe, 2015).

Ecolinguistics has its own diverse set of methods, but their enumeration here is not deemed necessary. They have been described by Steciąg (2012) and Stibbe (2015) and include both linguistic and broader social-scientific ways of looking at language and its relationship with the world. What is important here is that ecolinguistics forms a part of a broader movement in social sciences that includes disciplines like ecological economics, ecopsychology, ecopoetics, ecocriticism, ecosociology, social ecology, political ecology etc. This change, called by Stibbe (2012) an ‘ecological turn’, might be seen as the next iteration of the ‘linguistic turn’ described earlier. As such, it can also leave its mark on IR as a science and provide it not only with new methods (which require some linguistic skills in the first place), but also genuinely new perspectives on how the language used in every discourse on international politics – including scientific discourse or the discourse of think tanks – shapes the world and contributes to its changes or stagnancy.

4. THE ECONOMIZATION OF DISCOURSE

Researchers of international environmental politics are already quite vocal about the fact that “neoclassical economists are a dominant voice in both policy and academic debates” even in their field (Clapp, 2006, p. 143). Moreover, the discourse of neoclassical economics has penetrated the whole field of IR and is most prevalent among liberal narratives that focus on growth and wealth accumulation as the only ways of overcoming environmental problems. As Clapp (2006) writes, the liberal institutionalist school of IR is the one that defends most of the basic assumptions of neoclassical economics, including the necessity of growth and an even deeper economic globalization according to the logic of capitalist rationality.

From a linguistic perspective, the economization of language has its roots in the discourse of the aforementioned neoclassical economics, which is “one of the most dominant and enduring stories that we live by” (Stibbe, 2015, p. 35). Stibbe (2015, p. 24) also writes that “of the many discourses which can be considered destructive, economic discourses are perhaps the most influential”. They are characterized by numerous features that stem from their core and flow outwards into every social practice. The central one is the division of humanity into ‘consumers’, ‘workers’, ‘investors’, ‘owners’ – each with its own, rigidly fixed position and function (to consume, to work, to invest, to own). What is important is that these roles are not self-assigned, but they are instead imposed by the discourse of neoclassical economics (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Stibbe (2015) notices that these roles frame all actors as purely economic ones rather than as complex beings in the web of life. The same happens with nonhuman parts of nature which are assigned specific roles in the economized discourse, thus becoming ‘goods’ existing only to satisfy ‘needs’ through ‘extraction’, ‘purchase’ and ‘consumption’ according to their ‘utility’. Stibbe cites Shiva (2000) on how this discourse marginalizes sustainability or sharing and prioritizes competitiveness and market efficiency. Stibbe (2012) also claims that any representation of success in purely financial terms is part of the ‘neoliberalization’ of discourse – which is another term that often comes up in critical accounts of modernity.

Having pinpointed the source of the destructive economization one can notice it in all areas of life and all layers of politics. Halliday (2003) was the first one to critique the ‘*growthism*’ of modernity’s language. It is the ideology of growth applied to everyday language,

which cannot be studied only through a linguistics perspective, but needs a much broader, socio-political analysis. For Halliday, it is also inherently connected to classism – and Stibbe's (2015) analysis of the language of economics shows that it reinforces the divisions of classism through the economic functionalism. In the context of IR, this can be extrapolated from individuals onto international actors – mostly states – which are also divided by their 'purchasing power' or 'access to resources', thus strengthening the existing relations of production and the hierarchies of domination. One might call it a linguistic realization of the core-periphery structure explained by Wallerstein (2004). It can be best seen in the prevalent hierarchization of states according to their GDP, as if it was all that counted.

What is important for the aim of this article is emphasizing the connection between economization and ecology in discourse. This is probably best visible through the lens provided by Steciąg (2012) in her analysis of ecological discourses. She describes the model (or metaphor) of 'ecology as economy', which has become the most dominant one in public discourse and is now regarded as 'natural', because so much in life has gotten reduced to economic relations of buying and selling or producing and consuming. In this model, the ecological crisis is only treated as a 'market failure' and any environmental problem is first addressed as a threat to the economy. This also means that the environment becomes completely countable and its value is only calculated according to the economic laws that are currently in force. Moreover, the model of 'ecology as economy' limits the political imagination and makes economic solutions the only solutions taken into account. In the context of international environmental politics this is most clearly visible in the domination of the concept of 'sustainable development', which Steciąg (2012) describes as an excellent example of the economic perspective and the ideology of growth. Thus, the capitalist exploitation of nature is naturalized in the economized discourses and the assertion that an ecologically sustainable capitalism model is impossible is ignored (Gunderson, 2015). Research has already shown how the rhetoric of sustainable development is skewed and used apologetically towards the economic *status quo* (Hartwick & Peet, 2003). Furthermore, the term 'natural resources' – so common in the study of IR and geopolitics – is an incarnation of an even stronger economization, which is the model of 'ecology as a monetary system'. In it, nature is commonly framed by phrases such as 'costs', 'profits', 'returns' etc. Profitability becomes the main (or only) measure of necessity and efficacy of environmental protection and civilizational changes.

The connection between the economization of discourse and international environmental politics is described by Chaturvedi and Doyle (2015, p. 104): "as the market is deemed 'natural', the ecology of the ecosphere becomes 'the market'. All inputs and outputs are given value in monetary terms and then, so it is argued, the 'natural', 'real' and 'essentialist' economy of ecology shall emerge, unfettered by the constraints of science and governmentality". The two scientists noticed that the economized discourse on climate change and climate policies is founded on a type of 'trickle down effect', where more wealth means more ecological health for all beings and ecosystems, and market solutions are the default answers for every problem. They describe how under this model each citizen becomes solely a consumer, whose only desire should be being integrated into the Western/Northern markets in a post-political manner. It strongly commodifies nature and cements rather than challenges global inequalities and biases (Chaturvedi & Doyle, 2015). This economization is also ahistorical in its core, absolving the major contributors to the environmental degradation of their responsibility. It is also wrongly universalizing and being blind to different needs of people around the world.

This ahistoricism and universalization are typical not only of the economized discourse on environmental politics but also of the mainstream paradigms of IR themselves (Cox, 1981; Germain & Kenny, 1998).

What is important is that the hegemonic discourses of progress, consumerism, neoliberalism and neoclassical economics – which have an enormous impact on ecosystems (Stibbe, 2012) – are all tightly connected to mainstream paradigms in IR. This is why the ecolinguistic approach lends itself so well to any critical and reflexive inquiry into the theory of IR itself. By studying the liberal, institutionalist and rationalist discourse in IR through an ecolinguistic lens one can point out some of its flaws and explain how it reproduces environmentally destructive social practices. This is undoubtedly an enrichment of the critical theory of IR and a way of partially explaining and contesting the ‘imperialism of economics’ that exists in the whole field of social sciences (Blok, 2017).

5. SAMPLE EMPIRICAL APPLICATION: THE DISCOURSE OF EUROPEAN THINK TANKS ON THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In order to shortly and concisely showcase the synthesis of a critical approach to IR and ecolinguistics, a limited case study will be presented here. It is by no means exhaustive and cannot be the basis for formulating any generalizations or meta-conclusions, but it serves as an example of operationalizing the proposed interdisciplinary approach. What it does is present a few instances of the economization of discourse on international environmental politics and link them to the critical-theoretical and ecosophical basis described earlier.

The corpus of texts is a set of publications (‘expert comments’) from selected Western think tanks. They were chosen mostly because of the limited scope of their narratives as well as their relatively simple language and clearly visible presuppositions. Moreover, the narratives contained in the discourse of Western think tanks can usually be easily matched to specific mainstream paradigms of IR, i.e., realism, liberalism and constructivism.

The discourse contained in the on-line publications of think tanks has another important quality. Namely, it is a link in the discursive chain between the language of science of IR and the language of international politics itself. A discursive chain here is defined as a flow of language elements and styles between a scientific discipline and peripheral languages which become the basis of producing texts that serve a non-scientific purpose. These chains are a field of superposition of different contexts and discourses in a single framework of interconnected social practices and institutions (Duszak, 2015). This, in conjunction with the assumption that discourses are not only social, but also ecological phenomena, allows one to study the discourse of think tanks through an ecolinguistic lens as well as a theoretical one.

Whether think tanks have any measurable impact on public discourse is another matter entirely. There are different variables that one must take into account – area of interest, geographical location, political affiliations or lack thereof, and even the favorable or unfavorable stance of influential media (Lalueza & Girona, 2015). All of those matter when it comes to quantifying the real impact that the experts’ opinions and prescriptions have on policy-making and public support for different policies. Nevertheless, it was assumed here that IR think tanks do influence international politics in some recognizable way and that their discourse forms a link in the discursive chain between the science of IR and policy-making.

The think tanks chosen for this short empirical study were: Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA, known as Chatam House) and El Real Instituto Elcano. They are the best IR think tanks from each country, according to the McGann report (McGann, 2020). The corpus is from 2015–2016, because all of the chosen texts pertain to one specific event in international environmental politics – the Paris Agreement. There are six analyzed texts and their common denominators are the topic, the economization of discourse used by the authors, and language of publication (English).

In order not to unnecessarily complicate the analysis, sets of specific sentences chosen to study the phenomenon of economization are given below in two groups. Each of the citations is provided with a tag in parenthesis which corresponds with the specific source, detailed in the appendix to the article. This is done to disconnect the content of the text from its source and author to avoid biases. Some phrases have been intentionally emphasized with italics:

Based on a self-empowerment or self-regulation mode of climate action, they offer attractive approaches alternatives to complement the market-based approach of managing environmental externalities, for instance through the internalization of a carbon price. (TT:1)

The costs of a low-carbon pathway are falling, while the benefits are becoming increasingly clear. Since Copenhagen, the costs of renewable energy technologies have continued to fall precipitously [...]. Renewables are [...] competitive with fossil fuels [...]. Although coal remains the largest and cheapest source of power, it kills; the costs of premature deaths [...] can approach, or even exceed, 10 per cent of gross domestic product in high-carbon emitting countries. (TT:2)

[...] climate change is already affecting our economies, or will do so in the medium and long terms. In fact, analysis [...] on less developed countries [...] confirm the relationship between economic growth and temperature increases. [...] by the end of the century global GDP per capita could be 23% lower in high greenhouse gas (GHG) emission scenarios compared to scenarios where there is no climate change [...]. (TT:3)

There is growing consensus that the impacts of climate change in Latin America will carry a hefty price tag. (TT:4)

The above prove two things. The first one is the extensive use of economic terminology which is the most clearly visible – but also most superficial – effect of the economization of the discourse on IR. One can see that the biophysical environment necessary for human survival is framed (Stibbe, 2015) as an ‘environmental externality’ which is supposed to be ‘managed’. At the same time, the irresponsible CO₂ emissions are seen as having no clear perpetrators, so they have to be assigned a ‘price’, which must then be ‘internalized’ – as if the question of responsibility was only one of who gets to part with some of their income. The ‘ecology as economy’ metaphor (Steciąg, 2012) is visible in each sentence where real biophysical processes and phenomena – which are inherently tied to the survival of life on Earth – are measured only according to their ‘price (tag)’, ‘costs’, ‘cheapness’ and ‘competitiveness’. Even human (premature) deaths are only brought into the discourse because of their impact on GDP, completely obscuring the issue of their ethical value.

This fetishizing of GDP is the second matter that becomes visible through the critical-ecolinguistic lens. It is the embodiment of ‘growthism’ as described by Halliday (2003). Moreo-

ver, it is a clear sign of a kind of backwardness of IR discourse, which completely ignores other measures that have been available for years. Stibbe (2012) recognizes the impossibility of altering the marking of the term ‘growth’ and instead proposes that we just stop talking about it and find other measures that will tell us about the true well-being of all life on the planet. The same can be said about GDP as a measure, which is inadequate and teleological, used to justify itself and not measure actual well-being. It seems prudent to recall the words of the authors of a *Nature* article, who argue that the world has changed and GDP is a “misleading measure of national success” which leads to “the continued destruction of the natural capital on which all life on the planet depends” (Costanza *et al.*, 2014, p. 283–4).

The second set of sentences shows yet another problem:

Though not perfect, the outcome will send a clear signal to business and investors to prepare for a lower carbon future. (TT:5)

It is hence not surprising that mainstreaming climate risk analysis in investment portfolios is beginning to occur. According to BlackRock [...], asset owners are starting to worry about stranded assets [...]. (TT:3)

Spanish investors should follow these processes carefully to capitalize on the opportunities derived from increased low-carbon finance. (TT:4)

The issue here is placing ‘business’, ‘investors’ and ‘asset owners’ in the center of the discourse. This is not only an embodiment of the economic functionalization of discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012), but also a very reductive and unequal one. The whole texts, from which the citations are taken, focus on those categories, mostly ignoring all others.

One thing that ecolinguistics can help uncover is also the erasure of nature from discourse (Stibbe, 2015). Both sets of sentences show how IR analysts follow the notion of neoclassical economics where nature has been mostly excluded from consciousness and calculations and is only recently being ineptly patched onto those. The whole natural world is given a mask – ‘carbon’ – which epitomizes only one aspect of human-nature relations while obscuring everything else, including the inherent value of nature.

All of the above seems to linguistically confirm the opinions of Chandler, Cudworth and Hobden (2018) about the continuous and unflagging attachment of the discipline of IR to modernist assumptions and categories. Those – as the ontological and epistemological foundations of the discipline – flow out into every discourse on IR which is at least partly based on science (and the discourse of think tanks is certainly one). Chandler, Cudworth and Hobden (2018) point out the role of capitalism and the discourses that legitimize it in the formulation of academic IR. By analyzing the contemporary discourses, one can assert that the economization of peripheral discourses is only one of the aspects of this bigger process.

One must also remember that ecolinguistics is not only a tool of critique but also one of empowerment and emancipation and every opportunity should be taken to reinforce positive ideas. It seeks not only to find and unveil the destructive discourses but also strengthen the ecologically beneficial ones. This is why the analyzed narratives cannot be unanimously categorized as destructive – only their parts have such features. Among the clearly economized discourse they still contain sentences which are actually beneficial or at least desired from a socio-ecologically informed point of view. Examples are:

[...] the Paris conference will be our second and probably last chance at defining a global legal framework for climate action. (TT:6)

[...] it would be naive to suppose that the world's largest collective action problem will be solved through individual action [...]. (TT:2)

The joy of diplomatic success must not lead to complacency. We have to act now and continue to do so until low carbon economies become the norm. Success [...] will require nothing short of a post-industrial green revolution. (TT:3)

These are provided here in order to finish the article on a more positive tune. It is apparent that the cited analysts and experts on foreign affairs and international relations are capable of expressing genuine care for the well-being of the global ecosystem. They are also not afraid to voice strong opinions and give bold prescriptions. They have, however, visibly lost the interdisciplinary and politics-centered legacy of the science of IR, allowing themselves to reduce their ontology and limit their epistemology when it comes to explaining the world. Too much of their discourse is reduced to superficial economic analysis. One unanswered question here is why has this happened and what exactly was the role of academia? This can be an inspiration for further research incorporating the critical theory of IR, discourse analysis, including ecolinguistics, and broader perspectives of sociology of science.

6. CONCLUSION

While drawing from the knowledge and achievements of other social sciences is very much desired in the study of IR, allowing only one to dictate the shape of the discourse is dangerous. An ecolinguistic perspective shows that excessive reliance on the language, categories and assumptions of economics transforms the IR discourse into an environmentally destructive one. It then tends to reproduce and legitimize processes and phenomena like over-commodification, simplistic functionalization, disregard for natural limits and general anthropocentrism or capitalocentrism. Capital relations are often being privileged above power relations and environmental relations. Political analysis itself becomes post-political.

IR scholars and analysts should not cede their responsibility and their opportunities to economists when it comes to giving solutions to the environmental crisis. After all, not everything in the world order revolves around capital. The legacy of the discipline and its propensity for interdisciplinarity should provoke different outcomes – especially considering the huge responsibility of all that contribute to the formulation and realization of international environmental politics through their discourses, including scientists and analysts. This is not a call for every researcher or expert to start using ecolinguistics in his/her work, but to acknowledge its existence and distance himself/herself from the produced discourse in order to judge its ecological impact. After all, every use of language is not only a social phenomenon, but also an ecological one (Steciąg, 2012). Such reflectivity might also become one of the possible ways to defend the discipline of IR against calls for its abolishment (Burke et al., 2016), by bringing nature back into the study of the international (Corry, 2019).

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APPENDIX

This appendix provides details of the source of data analyzed in this article. Throughout the text, data is referred to using tags consisting of an abbreviation ('TT' for 'think tank') and a number. The number refers to the specific on-line publication. The list below in order of appearance in the article:

- TT:1 Mathieu, C. (2015). *Road to Paris: What Would Be a Successful Outcome for COP21?*. Institut français des relations internationales. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/editoriaux-de-lifri/edito-energie/road-paris-what-would-be-successful-outcome-cop21>.
- TT:2 Bailey, R. (2015). *Prospects for Climate Success in Paris*. Chatham House. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2015/11/prospects-climate-success-paris>.
- TT:3 Lázaro-Touza, L. (2016). *COP21 and the Paris Agreement: a diplomacy masterclass in search of greater climate ambition*. El Real Instituto Elcano. Retrieved from: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/climate-change/ari2-2016-lazarotouza-cop21-paris-agreement-diplomacy-masterclass-search-greater-climate-ambition.
- TT:4 Edwards, G. & Lázaro-Touza, L. (2016). *Spanish investors can capitalize on the low-carbon transition in Latin America*. El Real Instituto Elcano. Retrieved from: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/climate-change/ari33-2016-edwards-lazarotouza-spanish-investors-can-capitalize-on-the-low-carbon-transition-in-latin-america.
- TT:5 Thomlinson, Sh., & Bailey, R. (2015). *Paris Climate Deal Establishes a New Normal*. Chatham House. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2015/12/paris-climate-deal-establishes-new-normal>.
- TT:6 Faure-Schuyer, A. (2015). *Innovation: a New Mode of Climate Action*. Institut français des relations internationales. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/editoriaux-de-lifri/edito-energie/innovation-new-mode-climate-action>.