

Preface

This anthology is the result of a conference of the same name, which took place in digital format at the Ruhr University Bochum on 7 and 8 October 2021. The event was organised by Dorothee Meer (German language didactics), Sebastian Susteck (German literature didactics) and Judith Visser (didactics of Romance languages). It provided a venue for the interdisciplinary discussion of sustainability from the perspective of various subjects and academic disciplines.

The topicality of the keyword *sustainability*, as contained in the title of this special issue, is obvious: The sheer number of alarming reports about worldwide floods, e.g., in Pakistan, thawing permafrost in Siberia, melting glaciers and polar caps, forest fires in Europe or the loss of animal and plant species worldwide is as evident as it is frightening. These developments make it necessary for school lessons to take up and think through the topic of sustainability. Considering the fact that human perception and communication about nature are in a reciprocal relationship, the following important questions arise: How is sustainability communicated? What ideas are hidden behind it? And how does talking about environmental challenges influence available options for taking action? Classroom content and learning objectives need to tie in and further develop these thoughts, as the role of language for sustainability development has been long underestimated: This makes language teaching an important element in the context of Education for Sustainable Development.

The aim of the symposium was to discuss questions of ecological sustainability from a perspective of linguistic analysis as well as based in a theory of action together with researchers from different philological disciplines. With that reasoning, academic experts and didacticians in the various disciplines were invited.

The symposium examined two core concepts of language teaching in schools, narrative and metaphor, in the context of sustainability. The exploration of narrative structures and metaphorical forms of speaking and writing may not be new, but using them for pressing (real-world) problems of teachers and students is by no means an established form of constituting classroom subject matter: Solid arguments are not enough to convey how urgent the need for a sustainable transformation of our lived world is. That said, metaphorically and

narratively structured approaches to taking on this problem are neither banal, nor have there been comprehensive empirical analyses regarding the relevant discursive objects until now. Against this background, researchers from various academic fields (with a focus on discourse analysis, ecocriticism and ecolinguistics) and from the field of didactics (e.g. Education for Sustainable Development) met to discuss sustainability narratives and metaphors within and for language teaching in schools from theoretical, empirical-analytical and didactics-action-oriented angles. These conference proceedings document the process as well as the results of the symposium.

In the first contribution to the volume, titled “Language and Ecology: From Ecocritical Discourse Analysis to Digital Storytelling in the Language Classroom”, Hermine Penz examines both the role of language in the development of environmental problems and its function in overcoming them. She focuses on “life-sustaining” relationships between humanity, language, the environment and living things. Starting with a literature-based analysis of ecological linguistic criticism and ecocritical discourse analysis, she uses the debate on the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the Austrian city of Graz to discuss how proponents and opponents strategically employed sustainability discourse. She then applies the method of digital storytelling, showing how teaching within higher education can enable students to develop their view of an environmental problem in the form of short personal digital stories to inspire people to take more action for a more sustainable life.

When searching for sustainable ways of life, it seems promising to look at indigenous cultures in Latin America whose concept of *Buen Vivir* (as one example) seems to offer an alternative to the Western-colonial approach to natural resources. Monika Wehrheim’s contribution “Can You Eat that Gold? – The Theft of Natural Resources Versus Sustainability as an Issue in Colonial Chronicles of America” shows that the question of a responsible use of resources was already being raised in colonial chronicles. Examining the effects of historical events on today’s social challenges is mandatory in modern curricula. Colonial chronicles – in this case from Latin America – form a textual basis for dealing with narratives and metaphors of sustainability that is at first glance quite unusual but at the same time quite compelling.

In his article “Environmental Risks and Sustainability Narratives in Peruvian Comics”, Elmar Schmidt uses the genre of comics and caricatures to examine

how Peruvian authors deal critically with ecological issues. He focuses on the symbolism of the pictorial representations as well as on the contemporary and historical dimensions of the debate. Comics as a text type have the potential to address students more strongly in their reading behaviour, while the combination of reading and visual comprehension sensitises them to the fact that metaphors and narratives by no means manifest purely on a linguistic level.

Jan Scheitza and Judith Visser broaden the perspective to include moving images and sound. In their contribution “‘Contagiare le persone tramite la potenza delle note e delle parole’? The Potential of Music Videos for Addressing Sustainability in the Italian Classroom”, they discuss the challenge of talking about environmental issues and sustainability metaphors with students who are beginner language learners. The authors discuss music videos, which can be rich in metaphor, as a possible approach that provides a linguistically simpler and more appropriate way of engaging with the subject of sustainability by exploiting videos’ multimodality.

Ecological dystopias are becoming increasingly popular in children’s and youth literature. Julia Stetter’s paper shows that this text genre presents a didactic challenge in the context of sustainability that should not be underestimated. Using Saci Lloyd’s novel *The Carbon Diaries* as an example, Stetter demonstrates not only what distinguishes ecological from political dystopias, she also teases out an ambivalence that emerges when ecological dystopias raise sustainability awareness on the one hand but pursue typical coming-of-age narratives on the other hand – something that can certainly distract from ecological issues.

Problems of ecological sustainability are to a significant extent problems of energy supply. As Sebastian Susteck’s contribution “Impossible Idyll. Narratives of Sustainability and Development in B. Traven’s Petroleum Novel *Die Weiße Rose* and How It Is Taught in German Lessons” argues, these problems are situated in the context of fossil-fuel reliant modernity. The interwar decades of the 1920s and 30s lend themselves to German language and literature teaching as a period that was heavily preoccupied with the opportunities and problems of the fossil revolution. Susteck’s article provides a systematic and historical insight into the context, analysing the modernisation and petroleum narratives B. Traven wrote into his novel set in Mexico. Susteck shows that Traven does not content himself with a dyadic narrative of indigenous subsistence farming and ecological destruction. Rather, although

deploring such destruction, he nevertheless paints a positive picture of petroleum modernity, drawing on Marx's and Engels's ideas. Against this background, the author then develops concrete suggestions for German classroom lessons.

Christian Hoiss's article "The Ecological Footprint in German Lessons. In Search of the Language-Didactic Potential of a Metaphor" discusses the example of the ecological footprint. He shows that this concept can, on the one hand, contribute as a measuring instrument to how individual and collective lifestyles influence the earth positively or negatively in the long term. Hoiss points out that the ecological footprint is advancing in public discourse to become a generally recognised indicator of sustainable action and is being enthusiastically seized upon in media and education, for example, to trigger individual and collective processes of reflection. On the other hand, the concept also illustrates that the metaphor conceals a multitude of cognitive structures and normative implications that usually remain unreflected. In addition to this analysis of the ecological footprint metaphor complete with a critique from a cultural studies standpoint, the article provides ways of initiating linguistic learning and processes of reflection within this context.

The next paper by Dorothee Meer, entitled "*GRÜN-OHR HASE – Green Clean – KLIMAPOSITIV – Metaphors and Narratives of Sustainability in Food Advertising on Instagram*", deals with narratives and metaphors in the field of hypermedia food advertising. Drawing on an empirical study of 200 Instagram posts from four food sector accounts, Meer explores the potential that the findings open up for treating sustainability issues in German lessons (primarily in Year 9). One thing she points out is that the focus on questions of the multimodal construction of sustainable advertising worlds enables analytical insights about a text type from students' lived experience (Instagram posts). In addition to that, this analytical work also helps students become more competent in taking informed action in these matters.

Dietmar Osthus ("*patrimoine culturel et gastronomique or épouvantable cruauté? – Metaphorical Conceptualisation and Competing Argumentation Strategies in the French Debate about Foie Gras Production*") dissects French customs surrounding Christmas foie gras from a sustainability perspective. He uses the argumentative strategies of supporters and opponents of foie gras production

to show how different metaphorical conceptualisations can contribute to framing certain practices as 'natural'.

The final article "Creative Communications and Sustainable Narratives: Scale, Latency, Entanglements" written by Roman Bartosch deals with the necessity and challenge of creative communication. Bartosch problematises the purely instrumental notion of sustainability-oriented literacy concepts, which essentially want to convey climate science facts, climate-friendly attitudes and behavioural patterns. Using the concepts of narrative and metaphor, the author develops an alternative didactic approach to literature that allows creative narrative forms to be integrated into sustainability education contexts. Specifically, he focuses on frequently mentioned narrative and cognitive-analytical challenges of climate change, which can be described as scale, latency and the complex entanglement of various elements of human and non-human life.

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