

Lexical Choices and Environmental Despair: Analyzing Water Scarcity in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Tamarisk Hunter*

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Abstract

The Tamarisk Hunter, a recent short story by Paolo Bacigalupi, has garnered widespread praise for its realistic portrayal of the current ecological discourse. The narrator articulates a fictional world that accurately portrays the genuine issue of water scarcity. The narrative centers on a central character who has been tasked with the task of removing the tamarisk trees, as they are consuming an excessive quantity of water, resulting in a water shortage. Bacigalupi employs a variety of lexical items, including "bone-dry," "parched," and "dust-choked," to depict a desolate land in the narrative. In the same vein, the terms "water warlord" and "water credits" delve into the future of this universe. The primary focus of this paper is on these lexical choices. In this regard, the analytical section will utilize eco-linguistic theory, which integrates a critical perspective on environmental issues and linguistic manifestation. Additionally, this study endeavors to isolate the author's lexical choices within the broader context of Eco-linguistics in order to illustrate the severe issue of water scarcity. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that Bacigalupi's narrative not only emphasizes the issue of water scarcity but also instructs its readers on the importance of water conservation and responsible usage. The narrative is also more versatile and explores additional aspects of environmental devastation by also addressing other critical issues related to the ecosystem, such as climate change and global warming.

Keywords: Eco-linguistics, water scarcity, narrative, lexical analysis, *The Tamarisk Hunter*.

Introduction

In the current worldview, environmental issues are the major sources of damaging ecosystem, health, economy and a relation between humans and nature. According to Ahmad, global warming is the result of deforestation. People are driven to make money by removing trees from the land and building new infrastructures houses

and industries. As Panja (2021) suggests that the omission of green on the land is the core reason behind global warming which results severe hurricanes, disasters and floods. The second significant problem is pollution. Bashir says that there are three major types of pollution which are the result of deforestation; the first air pollution which is the ultimate result of industries and vehicles. Second is water pollution which is also result of overuse of wastages of industries. According to Morin-Crini, Lichtfouse, Liu, Balaram, Ribeiro, Lu, & Crini, (2022). contaminated water also effects human health as well as environment. Third is soil pollution which also result of agricultural runoff and plastic waste that degrades the quality of crops as well as soil. Furthermore, urbanization is also a key factor which supports climate change and global warming (Sampson, 2020).

Taking this as a narrative soul, Bacigalupi has created a fictional world; the skeleton of plot is knitted with an issue of water usage. Lolo, the principal protagonist of the story, works for a company to cut the tamarisk trees which have been sucking excessive water. Because of them the surface of water has gone down, and the people fled away from the Colorado River. Lolo was assigned to hunt the trees that the American Southwest can save water and people could live there. The story portrays a divided California: the upper-class hoards water, while the lower class struggles to obtain it. Bacigalupi's narrative echoes themes from Orwell's "1984," highlighting societal inequality and lack of mobility. This fictional scenario reflects our current water use. In 2005, the U.S. used 349,260 million gallons of freshwater daily, with significant amounts for thermoelectric power (49%) and irrigation. Public supply accounted for only 44,200 million gallons. To conserve water, individuals can take shorter showers, run full laundry loads, and avoid wasteful practices like decorative fountains.

Pertaining to the previous discussion, the objective of this paper is to examine the lexical choices employed in the selected short story, specifically the narrator's use of evocative lexicon to illustrate a scenario in which water scarcity is a significant issue. Further, the analytical section follows eco-linguistic theory to draw discussion on the story.

Literature Review

The modern world faces environmental disasters, putting our ecosystem at risk. Science and technology alone can't solve this; attitudes toward nature must change. Literature, often overlooked in this regard, has a role in fostering a deeper understanding of nature. Ecocriticism, a movement emerging over the last three decades, emphasizes the connection between literature and the environment. Coined by William Rueckert in 1978, Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literary works and the physical environment, advocating for a reassessment of human interaction with nature (Aslan, & Bas. 2020). According to Buell, Ecocriticism has two waves. The first focused on nature writing, pastoral poetry, and wilderness, aiming to restore a wild, non-human environment. The second wave expanded to include suburban, agricultural, and managed wild spaces, taking on a more activist role. Postcolonial Ecocriticism, gaining popularity recently, addresses the concerns of marginalized people affected by environmental issues (Barry, 2017). Ecocritical readings of literature reveal a strong environmental consciousness. For instance, Edward Thomas and T. S. Eliot expressed concern over the human-nature relationship. Romantic writers often linked women's potential with nature, and poets like William Butler Yeats infused their work with ecological views, highlighting the interconnectedness of culture and the natural world (Jin, 2022). Thomas Hardy's works, such as "The Breaking of Nations" and "Far from the Madding Crowd," also reflect Ecocritical themes, emphasizing the harmony between humans and their environment. Ecocriticism aims to raise ecological consciousness and promote a more sympathetic attitude toward nature (Shrivastwa, 2020).

Lexical relation is a part of semantic study focusing on the relationships between word meanings. Bolinger defines it as the meaning connection between two or more words. Lexical relation encompasses the lexical semantics that represent and interrelate word meanings in a language. Essentially, it is a semantic concept that describes how the meaning of one word relates to the meanings of other words (Piotrowski, 2022). Lexical relations involve studying word meanings and their interconnections, which can be complex. This study often compares predicates about the same expression to understand these relationships better. Lexical relations describe how the meaning of one word is connected to others, forming part of a word's or utterance's overall meaning. This involves analyzing all words or sentences to differentiate between lexical relations and meaning characteristics (Church, 2021). According to Gorys Keraf, lexical relations include synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy, polysemy, and homonymy. These relations are also known as synonymy, antonymy, homonymy,

hyponymy, meronymy, homophones, and polysemy. Understanding a word's definition helps comprehend its connection to other terms in the language (Hasanah, & Habibullah, 2020).

Thus, lexical relation analyzes how words relate to each other, helping readers understand lexical meaning from words to sentences. It classifies relationships into antonymy, synonymy, homonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and polysemy.

Eco-linguistic: An analytical framework

Eco-linguistic is implemented as an analytical framework in this study. Eco-linguistics is a critical perspective on the use of linguistic elements, such as metaphors, narratives, and diction, to address ecological issues. It is a combination of language and environmental concerns. In this regard, the analytical section will endeavor to investigate the manner in which Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Tamarisk Hunter* fairly conveys ecological teachings by articulating concrete terminology through lexical analysis. Lexical items are employed to more accurately represent a specific subject or issue. Lexical choices facilitate the rapid exploration of the subject matter and the examination of the manner in which a particular subject has been communicated through the selection of specific nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Meyer defines lexical items as words that clearly illustrate the entirety of the text. Therefore, the analytical section will employ Eco-linguistic theory, with a primary emphasis on the lexical choices that have been employed to dispute about water scarcity.

Additionally, the methodology for data collection and analysis is entirely qualitative. The primary data is derived from the original text of the story, which includes the words, phrases, and narratives. Additionally, the eco-linguistic method will be employed to analyze the data that has been collected. Additionally, the analytical section will incorporate the fundamental concepts of ecocriticism that enhance comprehension of the water scarcity issue.

Eco-linguistic Analysis of *The Tamarisk Hunter*

The narrative commences with "*a substantial tamarisk*" that consumes "*73,000 gallons*" of water annually. The opening line of the narrative communicates two significant lexical representations: the first is the immense tree, and the second is its capacity to absorb an amount of water equivalent to nearly 200 people annual consumption. Additionally, the term "sucks" implies an equivalent degree of damage to that of a parasite. The narrator's selection of this specific diction describes the process by which certain plants utilize an excessive amount of water, which can result in water scarcity. Simultaneously, the narrator underscores the importance of plant selection in order to protect the environment. The information is concerning and should be regarded as a potential hazard to the scarcity of water. Consequently, this prompts Lolo, the protagonist of the narrative, to take the issue of water excess seriously, and he "*rips tamarisk all winter long*" (p. 1). Bacigalupi contextualizes the past by stating that "*ten years ago,*" life was not as critical but "*a good living.*" This is after he has highlighted the critical situation of water usage. The inhabitants of the riverbank have been enjoying a comfortable existence until the tamarisk was planted between the Russian olives and elms. The livelihoods of neighboring towns have been significantly impacted by this action, as they are unaware of the water consumption of tamarisk trees.

The water surface has receded, but "tamarisk" continues to thrive. Lolo descends and observes this. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the vicinity of the river are "dehydrated." This illustrates that individuals are "overwhelmed" by water scarcity, despite the fact that the underlying cause of the scarcity remains unchanged. The narrator articulates the lexical depiction, such as "dried out," which indicates that individuals have been experiencing difficulty in locating water. They have dispersed like "dandelion seeds," settling in any available space. The ecological equilibrium has been disrupted, resulting in the death of fish due to water scarcity. Nevertheless, there is still water available. Despite the fact that the majority of the population has relocated to other locations, Lolo remains in the area to reside. His responsibilities include the removal of tamarisk trees in order to conserve water. He earns \$2.88 per day while employed at the Colorado River Basin. He takes a photograph of the tree before and after it is cut to serve as evidence that he has completed his duties. That location is described by Lolo as "*the river was a memory, a phantom trickle in the dust.*" This demonstrates that there was life in the past, but it is now merely the remnants of life. The town is devoid of people, the nature is devoid of greenery, and the river is devoid of water. The narrator intentionally cautions us about the future of this world and assigns us the responsibility of maintaining the water. Otherwise, we will be

confronted with the issue of water scarcity. The terms "scavenging," "scraping," and "hunting" depict the obstacles associated with locating water, which could potentially lead to a war-like situation in the future, as everyone would attempt to collect additional water. Conversely, individuals who were unable to locate water were unable to endure any longer. In this regard, the pursuit of water will be the most influential, existential, and political. Furthermore, in a region where water is more valuable than human blood, the situation was akin to *"a water warlord."*

Bacigalupi narrates, "The problem wasn't lack of water or an excess of heat, not really. The problem was that 4.4 million acre-feet of water were supposed to go down the river to California." This is very serious not for a particular part of the world but for the whole planet earth. As we know that all living being are dependent on water, if the earth faces an extreme level of water shortage, there will be chaos. There will be humans, but humanity would be blown away. The narrator warns us about careful use of water and

This distinction between perceived problems and their underlying causes highlights the mismanagement and regulatory constraints exacerbating water scarcity. The specific figure *"4.4 million acre-feet"* illustrates the scale of water diversion, emphasizing bureaucratic distribution that prioritizes California over regional needs. The phrase *"couldn't touch it"* captures the frustration and paradox of having a vital resource legally out of reach. *"They were supposed to stand there like dumb monkeys and watch it flow on by."* This dehumanizing comparison emphasizes the helplessness of affected communities, forced to be passive observers of their own deprivation. The metaphor highlights the brutality and absurdity of the situation, capturing the frustration and powerlessness felt by those affected.

Lolo's resignation to his harsh circumstances is evident in his reaction, "shook his head and swore 'without anger.'" The sophisticated language used to describe Lolo's emotional and psychological adaptation to constant hardships adds depth to his character. The phrase "it's lonely country" succinctly encapsulates Lolo's life, conveying the emotional toll of living in such a bleak setting. Despite the ambush, Lolo remains *"happy to run into Travis."* The contrast between the sudden threat and the joy of meeting another person underscores the importance of human connection in a harsh and lonely world.

"There was no escaping the sun" addresses the deforestation surrounding the river, highlighting that the tamarisk tree is not the only entity sucking water; the people are also exploiting the environment, resulting in global warming. Additionally, the sun is unobstructed in all directions; there is no shadow of a tree, no avian song, and no river sound. Bacigalupi emphasizes in this narrative the manner in which humans have eradicated the natural order, resulting in the existence of only "the sun" between the earth and the heavens. As Bacigalupi narrates, *"The desert always wins,"* implying that only the desert has been expanded by exploiting nature. Consequently, the land is swiftly becoming desert. Bacigalupi's lexical choices, including "weathered," "dehydrated," and "sunburned," also illustrate the challenges of survival.

The images "bone-dry," "parched," and "dust-choked" depict a location that has been deprived of its essence, akin to a lifeless body. The narrator communicates three distinct yet interconnected messages through these evocative linguistic choices. The term "bone-dry" implies that this land is devoid of trees, birds, and water, and as a result, it has been dried to the point of being devoid of flesh, much like a bone. The term "parched" denotes a desertified landscape that is devoid of vegetation. The absence of vegetation has led to a severe climate change, which has resulted in global warming. Consequently, the land is incapable of growing, resembling a desert. The term "dust-choked" is a representation of the environmental contamination that is caused by deforestation, smoke from vehicles, and industries. Therefore, these three definitions indicate that the earth is devoid of trees, much like a desiccated bone, and has been parched like a desert. Additionally, it has become a polluted environment. Furthermore, the terms "dehydrated," "weathered," and "sunburned" also explore the protagonist's internal dread.

The contrast between the "shining untouched river" and the adjacent emptiness underscores the absence of nature in the vicinity of the river. "Untouched" illustrates that it lacks a tree at the bank and no vegetation along the sides, but it contains a river. The characters' despair is further exacerbated by the polluted water in the river, as evidenced by the *"water trough, half-full of slime and water skippers."*

Bacigalupi's portrayal of Lolo as the savior of water and the growth of the enemy of water in the final scene of the narrative reveal a dual nature of humans. This is the dark aspect of human society, where they present

themselves as responsible, but it is all pretentious. In reality, they are indifferent and blatantly exploit the environment, as evidenced by Lolo's work as a "tamarisk hunter." Meanwhile, he has been "seeding new patches of tamarisk" to safeguard his occupation, which involves not only the removal of the water-sucking tree but also the cultivation of new plants of the same species. This underscores the fact that not all individuals are accountable for ecological issues; however, if an individual is presented with an opportunity to generate revenue, they may even exploit nature.

Conclusion

Bacigalupi's story beautifully talks about water wastage and water conservation. By making water the main subject, the story also brings other environmental factors into the discussion. The linguistic symbols used by the writer such as climate change are very successful in conveying his message. Also uses linguistic symbols in 2 major parts; The first is the indiscriminate use of water which the story illustrates with the example of the tamarind tree and the second is the waste of water for personal gain as we see the main character in the story planting seeds of forbidden trees to save his job. So that he can get paid to cut them. In addition to water, the story also criticizes climate change, warming, and deforestation. Therefore, the interpretation of the linguistic signs of this story not only forbids us from indiscriminate use of water but also teaches us to be aware of water scarcity as well as to conserve water. Further, this story also plays an important role in strengthening the connection between man and environment.

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