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REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Ideology-loaded national sustainability discourse: An eco-linguistic Analysis**Mohamed Abdelfattah Abdelraouf¹ & Abdelhamid Elewa²¹Preparatory Year Program, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia²Department of English Language, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Saudi Arabia*Correspondence: m.abdelraouf@psau.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates how the environmental sustainability ideology of Saudi Vision 2030 is constructed and reproduced in the Saudi secondary school Ecology textbook. Drawing on van Dijk's socio cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework, it examines lexicalization, agency, framing, pronoun use, and patterns of evaluation in the textbook discourse. Lexical analysis shows that the textbook consistently evaluates ecosystem sustainability positively and environmentally degrading activities negatively, while promoting conservation on religious, aesthetic, and economic grounds. These choices align the text with Vision 2030's largely neoliberal–anthropocentric environmental perspective and help shape students' mental models in ways that make this perspective appear both rational and morally justified. The study contributes to ecolinguistics and critical education research by showing how a national transformation plan with strong environmental elements is translated into educational discourse, and it provides insights to curriculum designers, policymakers, and teachers concerned with environmental education.

KEYWORDS: sustainability, critical discourse analysis, ecolinguistics, socio-cognitive approach, environmental ideology, ecology textbook

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Introduction

Discourse is inherently non-neutral; it is imbued with assumptions, values, and ideologies that extend beyond the immediate act of communication, i.e., the meta-discursive level (Blommaert, 2007; Cameron, 2004; Woolard, 1992). Two frameworks provide the tools to trace these dynamics. The first, rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), uncovers how language reproduces power and ideology, while the second, ecolinguistics, traces how such linguistic choices shape human relationships with the environment.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that examines how language in social contexts constructs, reproduces, and challenges power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). It treats discourse as a powerful means of maintaining or resisting ideologies rather than as neutral communication (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993a). CDA seeks to uncover hidden beliefs and values that shape how reality is perceived and represented, focusing on how ideologies operate implicitly through linguistic choices such as syntax and lexicalization to naturalize dominance or enable social change (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1995b). Ecolinguistics builds on Critical Discourse Analysis by extending its focus from human social power relations to the ecological systems that sustain life. It examines discourses that promote environmentally harmful practices, such as consumerism and climate denial, alongside those supporting sustainability and respect for non-human life. It shares methods with CDA but emphasizes impacts on ecosystems, future generations, and other species, and evaluates discourses according to ecological principles rather than solely social justice concerns.

In this respect, Saudi Vision 2030 emerged as a response to economic, demographic, and environmental challenges at both national and international levels. Within its strategic framework, environmental sustainability appears as a core component rather than a secondary concern (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). The Vision 2030 blueprint and Saudi Green Initiative (SGI) set ambitious environmental objectives: reducing carbon emissions, combating desertification while enhancing biodiversity, planting and restoring 10 billion trees, protecting land and sea areas, and promoting clean energy (Saudi Green Initiative, 2021).

However, close examination of Vision 2030 reveals that it reflects anthropocentric and neoliberal ideology in varied ways. First, it represents nature as economic capital. SGI aims for “a responsible transition to net zero, without compromising on economic development” through approaches generating “investment, jobs and opportunities to benefit millions of people,” allocating “\$187 billion” to create 700,000 green jobs and develop a \$25 billion climate solutions market by 2030 (Saudi Green Initiative, 2021). Second, it promotes technocratic solutions that prioritize market mechanisms over ecological limits. Third, it explicitly frames environmental protection as fulfilment of a religious obligation as religious values and teachings are emphasized in the Vision. This anthropocentric-religious framing is reinforced by the theme of SGI Day for 2025, namely, “Promoting a Culture of Environmental Stewardship” (Saudi Green Initiative, 2025).

These neoliberal-anthropocentric frames extend into education among other types of institutional discourse which reproduce the environmental ideology of the Vision. The Vision identifies education as vital for representing environmental policy into social discourse, realigning curricula with national objectives. It translates Vision 2030 goals into concrete learning outcomes across primary and secondary levels. This environmental policy appears in textbooks introducing ecological concepts like ecosystems and biodiversity. The secondary textbook *Ilm al-Bi'a*, “Ecology” specifically supports these objectives, making education an area where ideologies are mediated, normalized, and embedded in learners’ environmental understanding (Ma & Stibbe, 2022; Stibbe, 2015, 2021).

This role of ideological narratives aligns with Bourdieu (1991, p. 112) argument that education functions not merely as knowledge dissemination but as “symbolic capital” legitimizing social values, cultural orientations, and ideologies within society. In Saudi Arabia, this mechanism becomes particularly significant as education serves as the principal channel translating Vision 2030’s goals, priorities, and policies into pedagogical content and classroom practices.

However, significant gaps remain in this research area. Although there is a growing body of research on educational change following the launch of Saudi Vision 2030, there is still limited research that combines ecolinguistics with detailed analysis of school textbooks to uncover the environmental ideology embedded in them. Many studies focus on policy frameworks, descriptions of educational reforms, or broad assessments of environmental education (Al Darayseh & AlHawamdeh, 2024; AlGhamdi, 2025; Essa & Harvey, 2022), yet few studies have systematically examined how ideologies are enacted in specific textbooks. As a result, we know

relatively little about how the environmental ideology of Vision 2030 is enacted and reproduced in the Ecology textbook.

Theoretical Framework

CDA holds that language shapes and is shaped by societal structures (Fairclough, 2013a). Language does not merely describe social reality. Instead, it actively shapes, constructs, and transforms social identities, relationships, and knowledge. This reciprocal relationship between discourse and society either reproduces existing social structures or challenges established power structures (Fairclough, 1992).

Institutional discourse receives particular attention in CDA because access to it is restricted to specific elite groups, such as officials, experts, or politicians (van Dijk, 2015). This restricted access enables powerful groups to dominate discourse production and shape social cognition by disseminating their ideologies (Rogers, 2004; van Dijk, 1993a). Institutional discourse naturalizes power structures and legitimizes policies by presenting them as rational or inevitable (van Dijk, 1998, 2006c). This pattern is particularly evident in educational discourse, where state authorities with privileged access to curriculum design produce materials that embed dominant ideologies (van Dijk, 2015). Educational materials are often used to reproduce the existing power relations in society but can also introduce new ideologies and values. Since the introduction of formal education, shifts in state ideologies have been accompanied by a change in educational curricula (Apple, 2014; Kliebard, 2004). Cox (2011, p. 10) examines how political change and educational change are linked over time in Russia and the Soviet Union. She states Russian and Soviet education was influenced by political change. She also notes that “Russian education moved from traditionalist to experimental and back according to the trends in government stability and agenda,” which directly supports the idea that political shifts affected educational policy and practice.

CDA specifically investigates how educational materials are modified to reproduce prevailing state ideologies, revealing the mechanisms by which power structures sustain their dominance (van Dijk, 2015). CDA analysis extends beyond syntactic and lexical features to examine discourse at both micro- and macro-levels. It investigates how discourse naturalizes social hierarchies, presenting them as inevitable through deliberate choices in lexical selection, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies (Fairclough, 2013b; van Dijk, 2008). By linking textual features to social structures, CDA demonstrates discourse’s role in constructing reality to favor powerful social groups (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993a). This critical perspective highlights discourse’s ideological work, showing how it reinforces or contests power imbalances (van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2009).

Several major approaches have influenced CDA, each providing unique but complementary perspectives. Fairclough’s socio-cultural approach views discourse as a social practice shaping power relations, ideologies, and inequalities through three interconnected dimensions: text analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). This framework underscores the dialectical relationship between discourse and social change (Fairclough, 1993). van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, by contrast, focuses on how cognition mediates between discourse and society. It emphasizes the role of mental models, beliefs, and ideologies in text production and interpretation. Wodak’s discourse-historical approach examines discourse evolution through intertextuality and recontextualization within historical contexts (Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Reisigl, 2016). It integrates argumentative analysis, socio-diagnostic critique of power relations, and strategies for alternatives (Wodak, 2015). By connecting texts to socio-political histories, this approach reveals discursive struggles in nationalism and identity politics (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005). In contrast to cognitive or dialectical models, van Leeuwen’s framework focuses specifically on the representational processes. It offers systematic tools for analyzing how social actors and actions are represented in discourse (van Leeuwen, 2013).

While these approaches differ in methodology and emphasis, they share fundamental principles that unify CDA. First, CDA integrates linguistics, sociology, psychology, and history into discourse analysis. Second, it examines discourse across micro- and macro-levels. Third, CDA views language as purposeful rather than arbitrary. Finally, all approaches share the view that discourse shapes and is shaped by society. This renders CDA a robust framework for analyzing discourse across contexts like legal rhetoric, media, or policy.

Like CDA, ecolinguistics treats language as a social practice that shapes how people think, act, and justify power relations. However, it goes beyond that to investigate “how humans treat the ecological systems that sustain life” (Stibbe, 2017, p. 497). It emphasizes that protecting ecological systems is imperative for building

equitable and sustainable societies. Facing unsustainable ecological practices, according to ecolinguistics, requires addressing ecological and linguistic problems. Biodiversity loss, afforestation, chemical contamination, overlogging and other unfriendly environmental practices call for investigating the connection between ecology and language (Stibbe, 2017). Thus, ecolinguistics does not replace CDA but rather expands its critical focus by examining how discourse can promote exploitive and unsustainable ecological practices.

Ecolinguistics shares CDA's belief that discourse is never neutral. While CDA reveals how texts reproduce domination, inequality, and ideology, ecolinguistics examines how they support or damage ecological relationships and life systems. Stibbe (2015, p. 1) positions ecolinguistics as a form of critical discourse analysis, scrutinizing discourses—clusters of metaphors, evaluations, framings, and identities—to reveal underlying “stories we live by” that shape worldviews. These stories are evaluated against an explicit “ecosophy” or ecological philosophy to assess whether they promote care for ecosystems, species, and life systems or normalize destruction through harmful practices. As Stibbe states: “Ecolinguistics analyses language to reveal the stories we live by, judges those stories from an ecological perspective, resists damaging stories, and inspires stories that contribute to the flourishing of life on Earth” (Stibbe, 2021, p. 3).

Ecolinguistics retains CDA's linguistic analytical tools. It investigates how linguistic choices like metaphor, framing, agency, nominalization, and omission simultaneously serve ideological and ecological functions. This preserves CDA's analytical rigor while broadening the ethical scope to ecological outcomes. Stibbe (2015) identifies three types of environmental discourses: destructive, ambivalent and beneficial. Destructive discourses, he argues, “oppose the principles of the ecosophy” and contribute to ecological destruction. This view is shared by Glenn (2004, p. 65) who maintains that some discourses “sustain and perpetuate a practice that is cruel and environmentally dangerous”. Ambivalent discourses “frequently share some of the aims of the ecosophy” (Stibbe, 2015, p. 30). However, they are shaped by the political or commercial influences from the same society producing destructive discourses are solely motivated by economic growth which can have harmful impact on the environment especially in mature economies such as those of the developed countries. Ambivalent discourses, Stibbe (2015) argues, are criticized for portraying plants, animals, rivers, and forests as exploitable resources, framing environmental solutions as individual actions like recycling that avoid reducing societal consumption, and concealing agency to mask responsibility for ecological destruction. Stibbe (2015) classifies mainstream governmental environmental discourse as ambivalent, as it frames the environment as a means to serve human-centered short-term interests. Beneficial discourses value the lives and well-being of humans and other species, and advocate reduced consumption and social justice

Stibbe (2015) defines ecolinguistics' objective as analyzing the “stories-we-live-by” and their role in sustaining destructive cultures. He clarifies that a story is not a narrative in the traditional sense but “a mental model within the mind of an individual person” that can be the basis of the “*social cognition*” of groups of people and “influence how multiple people think, talk and act” (Stibbe, 2015, p. 10, italics in original). van Dijk's socio-cognitive model aligns particularly well with this view through its focus on mental models and ideologies as mediators between discourse and context. This cognitive foundation supports ecological analysis by illustrating how anthropocentric and ecocentric environmental worldviews shape discourse comprehension and production through polarized representations. In contrast, Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach prioritizes social practices and institutional power, offering less direct alignment with ecolinguistics' focus on individual cognition.

Literature Review

CDA research examines how educational discourse shapes power relations and ideologies. Rogers (2011) reviews a collection of CDA studies in education. The studies used Gee, Fairclough, and Kress frameworks to examine how power relations, ideology, identity, and exclusion shape literacy practices, student identities, teacher learning, policy implementation, and equity in schooling. These studies demonstrate that educational policies and classroom practices play a vital role in reproducing ideologies, challenging existing ones, constructing consensus, and maintaining power structures.

Berkovich and Benoliel (2024) offered a comprehensive review of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology, demonstrating its effectiveness in exposing power relations and dominance embedded in discourse. They illustrated how powerful groups deployed seemingly neutral texts to shape public opinion,

naturalize asymmetries, and reproduce hegemony. Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) texts, they revealed how these documents promoted Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) ideologies through argumentative subsections employing incomplete problem-solution patterns on teacher quality issues. Over-lexicalization portrayed change as urgently needed, legitimizing GERM policies while derogating educators.

Using an ecolinguistic approach to discourse analysis, Stibbe (2012) employed corpus linguistics and CDA to examine texts on human-animal relationships—including educational, official, creative, and media sources—to expose their underlying ideologies. He identified three discourse types: destructive, counter, and alternative. Destructive discourses dominated Western texts by erasing animals' individuality through collective nouns (e.g., "herd health"), nominalizations (e.g., "pork production"), and metaphors (e.g., animals as machines), positioning them as passive resources rather than beings with intrinsic ecological value. This justified exploitation while concealing cruelty. Counter discourses from activists challenged destructive framing (e.g., "pig murder" vs. "pork harvest") but failed because they reinforced animals' inferiority or lacked constructive alternatives. Stibbe promoted alternative discourses, found in Rachel Carson's lyrical prose and Japanese haiku, which restored animal agency through active verbs and fostered human-nature identification, presupposing animals' intrinsic value and consciousness to transform destructive ideologies.

Norton and Hulme (2019) examine how climate change is "storied" in five UK national newspaper editorials across 2001, 2007, and 2015. The study addresses four research questions: what main climate stories circulate, how newspapers promote them, and how external events shape their prominence. Adopting Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis, they connect linguistic choices, narratives, and ideologies to broader social and environmental consequences. Building on Nisbet's (2009) typology, they identify four stories: Lukewarmer (skeptical), Ecoactivist (urgent transformation), Smart Growth Reformer (policy-focused economic reconciliation), and Ecomodernist (technology and adaptation). Analysis reveals that the left-right divide among broadsheets had substantially weakened by 2015. The Ecomodernist story appeared across political lines, proving less divisive ideologically. While different viewpoints diverge in significant ways, points of alignment emerged particularly mutual acknowledgment of climate adaptation needs and energy R&D investment.

Yasmin et al. (2026) explore how nature and environmental issues are linguistically and visually represented in Pakistani EFL school textbooks (Grades I–X) used in Punjab. Drawing on Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics they analyze 10 textbooks for patterns in environmental discourse. The study addresses three main questions: the linguistic patterns used to describe the environment, the shift in these patterns from primary to secondary school, and the manner visuals depict nature and environmental problems. Overall, they find that environmental content is more frequent and thematically rich in lower grades than in higher grades. The study also reveals that texts tend to highlight sensory and experiential aspects of nature and promote pro-environmental behaviors through both language and images. Yasmin et al. (2026) argue that to promote ecological awareness and support students' engagement in environmental preservation, curriculum designers and textbook writers should integrate explicit, ageappropriate discussion of ecological issues and design verbal and visual content that invites critical reflection.

In the Saudi context, Almaghlouth (2022) investigated how environmental sustainability was constructed in Saudi Arabia's online media discourse through corpus-based discourse analysis of keyness, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity. The study built the Saudi Online Environmental Sustainability Corpus (SOESC), consisting of 87,237 words from Saudi Green Initiative news articles and English tweets from official environmental accounts. Linguistic analysis revealed that action discourse (protect, plant, achieve) dominated consequences discourse (emissions, methane, climate change), emphasizing state-led interventions over problem description. Analysis highlighted a strong emphasis on officials and decision-makers, suggesting sustainability was a national achievement project led by officials. Intertextuality linked Saudi initiatives to global sources like Reuters and Bloomberg, positioning them as internationally credible rather than framing environmental problems as shared global responsibility.

Jabeen (2024) investigates how environmental and climate concerns are framed in Arab News opinion articles from November 2022 to November 2023 in Saudi Arabia. Drawing on Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framing model and corpus analysis, Jabeen analyzes 129 climaterelated opinion pieces from Arab News from

November 2022 to November 2023. The study aims to achieve the three objectives: assess how climate issues are framed, identify dominant discursive and lexical strategies, and explore how this discourse may shape public understanding and engagement. These frames present climate change as a humancaused global emergency affecting both people and ecosystems. The analysis shows four central frames constructed around “climate”: change, crisis, fight, and collective action/responsibility, with “climate change” as the dominant collocation. The study concludes that through repeated frames and strategic lexical choices, the newspaper effectively raises awareness of climate change as an urgent, humancaused global emergency and encourages readers to assume individual and collective responsibility for remedial action.

The current study addresses a gap in ecolinguistic research by examining how shifts in environmental ideology are reflected in everyday school materials in a careful and balanced way. It focuses on the Saudi secondary school *Ecology* textbook as a key site where the broad environmental aims of the State’s ideology are translated into concrete classroom content. Following van Dijk’s sociocognitive framework, the study also examines how this content contributes to shared mental representations through which students come to understand the environment, themselves, and their responsibilities as members of society.

This study fills this gap by analyzing how the State’s environmental ideology is constructed, reproduced, or resisted in the secondary school ecology textbook. It addresses the following research question:

- (1) How is Saudi Vision 2030’s environmental ideology discursively constructed in the Saudi secondary school ecology textbook?

Answering this question allows for an integrated analysis of the ecology textbook to gain insights into how environmental ideologies are being promoted and reinforced among young learners in Saudi Arabia. This sheds light on the ways in which educational materials shape students’ understanding of environmental issues and their roles in preserving the environment.

Methodology

This study employs van Dijk’s (1998, 2006b) sociocognitive CDA model to analyze Vision 2030 environmental ideology construction in ecology textbooks. The model effectively analyzes how the State’s environmental ideology and beliefs about human-environment relations are constructed and reproduced in ecology textbook discourse.

Ideology occupies a central role in van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model as the shared belief system that organizes group attitudes and polarizes social representations (van Dijk, 1998, 2015). It functions as the cognitive framework that shapes both discourse production and comprehension while systematically influencing mental models.

van Dijk (2008) defines mental models as the dynamic, personal, multimodal representations of events and situations that language users continuously construct and update in discourse production and comprehension. They serve as the primary cognitive interface between ideology and discourse in this socio-cognitive model. In discourse, users actively update these models by accepting, resisting, or reinterpreting incoming information based on their ideological frameworks. This process reproduces dominant ideologies when updated models reinforce shared beliefs or enable resistance when conflicting discourse prompts belief revision. Thus, mental models mediate discourse’s role in either perpetuating or transforming societal power structures (van Dijk, 2008). van Dijk’s mental models are particularly useful for this study, as they reveal how students internalize the State’s environmental ideology through textbook material.

Larson (2011) examines metaphors in environmental science. He argues that although science appears ideologically neutral and objective, environmental metaphors mask biased ideologies, promote unsustainable worldviews, and shape public values and understanding. He demonstrates that the metaphors of “invasive species” and “invasional meltdown” frame non-native species as military threats and nuclear disasters, creating fear of ecological collapse that provokes emotional responses disproportionate to scientific evidence. Larson also notes that the metaphorical phrase “survival of the fittest,” which first appeared outside biology, reinforces a competitive worldview that overshadows symbiosis and mutualism. In the social sphere, it fueled Social Darwinism and competitive culture. He calls for more reflective, participatory choices of language and metaphors

that support socioecological sustainability, suggesting that better metaphors can strengthen relational thinking between humans, nature, and future generations.

Within this framework, the ideological square emerges as a primary discursive strategy that operationalizes group polarization through systematic linguistic choices. It emphasizes positive presentation of the in-group ('Us') while minimizing or negatively representing the out-group ('Them') (van Dijk, 1998). This strategy identifies representations of eco-citizens versus environmental violators (van Dijk, 2006b).

At the micro-level, lexical choices, evaluative adjectives, metaphors, and syntactic structures are examined within that model to identify how they enact environmental ideology. At the macro-level, the model provides an effective approach to examining how chapter schemas reinforce these mental models. The model also reveals how textbook content legitimizes punitive policies against environmental violators.

Data and Procedures

The corpus comprises the complete *Ecology* textbook, 2025 edition, which contains 181 pages and 12 chapters. This book was selected for the present study because it is the only textbook in the Saudi school curriculum devoted to this subject. It was incorporated into the Saudi secondary curricula following the launch of Vision 2030 to increase the students' awareness of environmental issues and was prepared by a "team of specialists," as indicated on the front cover. As noted in the introduction, the textbook aligns explicitly with Vision 2030 objectives in respect of its content, objectives and structural organization.

Structurally, the book is 181 pages long and consists of an introduction and five chapters: Principles of Ecology; Communities, Biomes, and Ecosystems; Populations Ecology; Biodiversity and Conservation; and Animal Behavior. Each begins with a clearly stated main idea in a sidebar on the opening page. Introductory activities then familiarize students with the chapter's topic, while the third page presents explicit learning objectives in the sidebar. Throughout the chapter, sidebars are used to link the content to the local environment of the students and Saudi Vision 2030. Sidebars appear on every page of each chapter to assess students' understanding through diverse experiments and evaluation activities. Chapters conclude with a summary, comprehensive chapter assessments, and a standardized examination.

The analysis covers chapter content, sidebars, captions, and the summary and assessment sections at the end of each chapter. The identification of environmental ideology in the textbook follows three steps. First, the entire textbook chapter is read to obtain an overall understanding of the environmental messages and to identify the main environmental themes. Second, the sentences or textbook activities that convey environmental ideology are identified. Third, each sentence or activity is classified into one of two categories: 'Stewardship and Conservation' or 'Green Economic Growth', which represent the two main ideologies associated with Saudi Vision 2030. Sentences or activities that emphasize protection, responsibility, limits on exploitation, biodiversity, sustainability, pollution reduction, or a moral duty toward nature are coded as 'Stewardship and Conservation'. Sentences or activities that emphasize environmental action through jobs, investment, technology, efficiency, competitiveness, renewable industries, or sustainable development as an economic opportunity are coded as 'Green Economic Growth'.

Linguistic analysis of discourse uncovers how language reproduces specific environmental ideologies (Fairclough, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2003; van Dijk, 2011). To address the current study's research questions on ideological construction in educational materials, analysis of microstructure features in the "*Ecology*" textbook examines lexical choices (wording, connotations), syntactic structures (voice, agency, nominalization), local semantics (implications, presuppositions), framing, topicalization, polarization, and intertextuality. These features reveal how subtle linguistic patterns construct and naturalize ideologies. Lexical analysis reveals how lexical choices signal value judgments (e.g., "land development" vs. "forest clearance"), syntactic structures obscure agency in environmental harm, semantic patterns embed unstated assumptions about human dominance, while framing and polarization prioritize certain ecological narratives over others. Stibbe (2015, p. 24) describes these as "patterns of linguistic features that run across multiple texts and subtly convey the same ideology over and over again," enabling systematic exposure of the textbook's underlying environmental worldview.

Given the size of the *Ecology* textbook, data analysis presents illustrative rather than exhaustive examples. Examples were selected on the basis of two principles drawn from van Dijk's sociocognitive model.

The first is recurrence: only patterns that appear repeatedly across chapters are treated as ideologically loaded, on the assumption that ideology operates through systematic repetition rather than isolated wording (van Dijk, 2006a). For each pattern reported below at least three independent occurrences were located before the pattern was treated as representative. The second principle is that examples were selected when they instantiate one of the discursive strategies that van Dijk identifies as central to ideology reproduction, namely lexical choice, the ideological square, agency assignment and obscuring, presupposition, etc. (van Dijk, 1998, 2006a, 2008). Where multiple textbook instances illustrate the same strategy equally well, the clearest and most explicit instance was selected. Examples drawn from the Arabic source are presented in a consistent scholarly Romanization, using macrons for long vowels and the symbols ‘ and ’ for ‘ayn and hamza. Each Romanized passage is followed by an English translation so that the lexical analysis remains traceable to the source wording without retaining Arabic script. Page references throughout indicate the location of each example in the 2025 edition of the textbook.

Analysis

Analysis of the discursive strategies and linguistic devices used in the textbook indicates that it reproduces the neoliberal-anthropocentric environmental ideology of the State through a coordinated set of strategies that map onto van Dijk’s sociocognitive account of ideology reproduction: source legitimation through citation, lexicalization, the construction of an in-group through pronouns, the activation of presupposed religious cognition, and the selective assignment of agency. First, Vision 2030’s environmental ideology is quoted twelve times in the textbook as a credible and authoritative reference. While quoting a source does not automatically entail endorsement, van Dijk (2015) treats unchallenged quotation of elite institutional sources as a paradigmatic strategy for establishing epistemic authority and naturalizing the cited ideology. This pattern also reveals the underlying mental models and ideology embedded in the textbook, which feed into students’ mental models and contribute to shaping social cognition. By presenting the State’s environmental ideology as factual and unproblematic, the textbook positions its environmental propositions as items of common ground that students are expected to incorporate into their mental models without further argument:

Romanized Arabic: *Naṣṣat al-Ru’ya fī majāl al-bī’a ‘alā mā yaḷī: “Yu‘addu ḥifāẓunā ‘alā bī’atinā wa-muqaddarātinā al-ṭabī‘iyya min wājibinā dīniyyan wa-akhlāqīyyan wa-insāniyyan, wa-min mas’ūliyyātinā tijāha al-ajyāl al-qādima, wa-min al-muqawwimāt al-asāsiyya li-jawdat al-ḥayāh.”*

English translation: “The Vision states the following with regard to the environment: ‘Preserving our environment and natural resources is a religious, moral, and humanitarian duty; it is among our responsibilities toward future generations and one of the fundamental components of quality of life.’”

Beyond authoritative citation, the Romanized Arabic wording repeats the first-person plural possessive enclitic -nā five times in a single sentence (ḥifāẓunā, bī’atinā, muqaddarātinā, wājibinā, and mas’ūliyyātinā), meaning “our preservation,” “our environment,” “our natural resources,” “our duty,” and “our responsibilities,” respectively. In van Dijk’s (1998, 2006a) ideological square, such repeated first-person plural pronouns are a primary device for constituting the in-group: they discursively enroll the reader into a collective ‘Us’ that bears shared duties. The textbook is not merely reporting that the State has a duty toward the environment; it is positioning the student as a member of the same moral community to which that duty belongs. Once the student accepts the ‘we’, the predicates that follow (religious duty, responsibility toward future generations, foundation of quality of life) are processed as in-group commitments rather than as external prescriptions, and the responsibility for environmental sustainability is symbolically distributed across citizens, the State, and learners alike. This is precisely the cognitive mechanism van Dijk describes: ideology becomes effective not by stating beliefs but by reshaping the mental models through which group identity, obligation, and value are organized. At this point in the analysis, it becomes evident that these local lexical and pronominal choices shape the mental models students form about environmental duty and, as those models become widely shared, they become part of the social cognition that aligns their environmental worldview with the ideological premises of the State.

However, van Dijk’s ideological square depends on the polarization of *Us* vs *Them*. With the State, its

institutions and the students constructed as *Us*, the textbook discursively constructs another generic and abstract group responsible for destroying the environment and referred to it as ‘humans’. “Humans” are mentioned twenty-four times in the textbook typically in co-text that links them to environmental harm. This creates a polarized narrative where the State, ‘government institutions and those who embrace their ideology’ are the rational, responsible actors who promote ecosystem sustainability, and other ‘humans’ are the undifferentiated public responsible for environmental degradation as shown in the following example:

Romanized Arabic: *Yushīru al-‘ulamā’ ilā anna sur‘at al-inqirāḍ allatī nuwājihuhā al-yawm takhtalifu ‘an al-inqirāḍ al-jamā‘ī fī al-mādī. Fa-sur‘at al-inqirāḍ al-hāliyya hiya naṭījat anshīṭat naw‘ wāḥid min al-makhlūqāt al-ḥayya, huwa al-insān—Homo sapiens. ... Inna taghyīr al-insān li-zurūf al-arḍ asra‘u min al-takayyuf bi-ṣifāt jadīda li-l-‘aysh fī al-zurūf al-jadīda.*

English translation: Scientists indicate that the rate of extinction we face today differs from the mass extinctions of the past. The current rate of extinction is the result of the activities of a single species of living creature: the human being, *Homo sapiens*. ... Human alteration of the Earth’s conditions is occurring faster than adaptation through new traits to those new conditions. (p. 119)

The textbook thus constructs environmental protection as not only urgent but necessary for human survival. Representing environmental degradation as a precursor to mass extinction and attributing that information to ‘the scientists’ serves an ideological purpose.

Within this framing, the textbook also shapes students’ social cognition by representing the claim about the looming extinction and its speed as backed by “science” in general, not by a contestable, situated study. This helps present the claim as an established fact rather than as one possible interpretation, which, in van Dijk’s terms, strengthens its role in shaping the shared beliefs of students, particularly when they see that the claim is less likely to be open to debate (van Dijk, 1998, 2006c) . Once students build the mental model that current environmental degradation leads to unprecedented extinction, they are more likely to accept the State’s environmental ideology, and its linked policy narratives, as necessary and rational responses.

Pronoun choice reinforces this alignment. By using the bound first-person plural prefix *n-* in the verb *nuwājihuhā* (“we face it”), the textbook positions the State and the students together as a unified in-group that collectively “faces” extinction. This we-versus-extinction configuration foregrounds extinction as an existential threat, while aligning students with the State’s involvement in regulating environmental practice.

Lexical choice further intensifies this effect. The phrase “mass extinction” does more than describe an increase in species loss. By invoking “mass extinction,” the textbook shifts students’ mental representation of biodiversity loss from a gradual trend to a single catastrophic event. This magnifies the perceived risk and increases the emotional weight of the problem and invites students to perceive it as an existential danger rather than a distant trend. In the context of the textbook, this framing prepares students to see the environmental programs of the State not as optional policy choices but as the necessary collective response to an ecological crisis, and thus to embrace its environmental ideology as common sense.

Grammatically, the textbook strengthens these meanings through emphasis as a discursive strategy proposed by van Dijk (2006a), particularly through the emphatic particle family *inna/anna*. In the clauses *anna sur‘at al-inqirāḍ allatī nuwājihuhā ...* (“that the speed of extinction we face ...”) and *inna taghyīr al-insān li-zurūf al-arḍ ...* (“indeed, human alteration of the Earth’s conditions ...”), these forms, combined with the relational process “X is Y,” foreground the propositions as strongly asserted factual statements rather than as one possible interpretation open to debate.

Taken together, these choices build a powerful ideological framing around two key presuppositions: that extinction is a shared, present crisis and that human alteration of Earth is abnormally fast and dangerous. First, the phrase “the speed of extinction that we are facing today” presupposes that extinction is not a distant, abstract process but a current reality confronting the in-group “we.” By treating the crisis as something “we” are already facing, the textbook does not argue that extinction is a problem; it assumes it as given. This presupposition shifts extinction from a topic for debate to a shared background condition of life, encouraging students to see environmental degradation as part of their collective present rather than as a hypothetical future risk. Second,

the statement “verily the human beings’ alteration of the Earth’s conditions is faster than adaptation with new traits to live in the new conditions” takes for granted that humans are already changing the planet and that this change is occurring at an unusually high-speed relative to natural adaptation. The presupposition does not ask whether humans are changing the Earth or whether adaptation can keep up; it takes both as established facts and only highlights the imbalance in speed. Ideologically, this normalizes a particular reading of human–environment relations in which human development is dangerous when left unchecked, and thus legitimizes discourses that call for State intervention in environmental management, regulation, and reforms that the State seeks to advance.

The personification of the environment in the textbook further constructs it as a benevolent provider requiring protection, as in the following examples:

Romanized Arabic: ... *al-tawāzun bayna ihtiyājāt sukkān al-‘ālam al-mutazāyida wa-l-mutazāmina ma‘a ihtiyājāt al-ḥayāt al-barriyya.*

English translation: ... the balance between the growing, simultaneous needs of the world’s population and the needs of wildlife. (p. 65)

Romanized Arabic: *Wa-yuṭlaqu ‘alā akbari ‘adadin min afrād al-anwā‘ al-mukhtalifa tastaṭī‘u al-bī‘a da‘mahu wa-musā‘adatahu ‘alā al-‘aysh ... al-qudra al-isti‘ābiyya.*

English translation: The largest number of individuals of different species that the environment can support and help sustain is called ... carrying capacity. (p. 89)

Romanized Arabic: *Al-qudra al-isti‘ābiyya: akbaru ‘adadin min afrād al-anwā‘ tastaṭī‘u al-bī‘a an tuwaffira lahu al-mawārid ‘alā al-madā al-ṭawīl.*

English translation: Carrying capacity: the maximum number of individuals of a species for which the environment can provide resources over the long term. (p. 89)

van Dijk (1998) identifies rhetorical figures as one of the discursive strategies the implements the ideological square and help control social cognition by naturalizing a certain group perspective into seemingly natural, reasonable, and emotionally compelling representations of social reality. Constructing ecological systems as a living organism that has “needs” and can “provide” and “support” other species turns “nature” into a moral subject that appears to deserve human care and protection. Stibbe (2015, p. 71) suggests that personifying the earth as a mother moves ecosystems “to the center of things,” highlighting their importance as objects of moral concern. Verhagen (2008, p. 114) similarly notes that personifying the earth assigns it intrinsic value and presents it as “worthy of human moral consideration.” Once students accept the metaphor of nature as a mother, it becomes morally compelling—if not imperative—to align themselves with the State’s environmental ideology and endorse its interventions in protecting it against unsustainable human activities. Thus, these local personifying verbs and nouns direct students to build mental models of ecological systems as benevolent, vulnerable providers, and when such models are shared across cohorts they foster a social cognition in which protecting ‘nature’ is experienced as both morally compelling and fully consistent with the textbook’s wider environmental ideology.

More broadly, the textbook frames environmental protection according to the Vision’s ideology. Two recurrent patterns in the textbook reproduce the Vision’s environmental ideology: PRESERVING ECOSYSTEMS IS A RELIGIOUS DUTY and NATURE AS RESOURCE as in the following example:

Romanized Arabic: *Wa-qad sakhkhara Allāhu subḥānahu wa-ta‘ālā mawārid al-ṭabī‘a; ḥaythu yumkinu an yaḥṣula al-insān ‘alā al-mā’ al-ṣāliḥ li-l-shurb bi-taklifa aqall min istikhdām al-taqniyyāt allatī tuṭī al-khidma nafsaḥā. Wa-ya‘taqidu ba‘ḍ al-‘ulamā’ anna al-ṭabī‘a yajibu an takūna al-khiyār al-awwal al-maṭlūb fī tazwīdinā bi-hādhihi al-maṣādir, wa-tushīru al-abḥāth annahu ‘inda ḥifẓ al-anẓima al-bī‘iyya al-ṣiḥḥiyya wa-ḥimāyatihā fa-inna al-fawā’id allatī tuwaffiruhā al-anẓima al-bī‘iyya satabqā aqall taklifa min al-khadamāt allatī tuqaddimuhā al-taqniyyāt li-mu‘ālaḥat al-mushkilāt al-bī‘iyya. (p. 117)*

English translation: “Allah, glorified and exalted be He, has subjected the resources of nature to human

use, so that people can obtain potable water at a lower cost than by using technologies that provide the same service. Some scientists believe that nature should be the first option for supplying these resources. Research indicates that, when healthy ecosystems are preserved and protected, the benefits they provide remain less costly than the technological services used to address environmental problems.” (p. 117)

Stibbe (2015, p. 47) defines a frame as “a story about an area of life that is brought to mind by particular trigger words.” Frames can be triggered by the careful selection of lexical items to get language users to understand reality from a certain ideological perspective. Lakoff (2010, p. 72) likewise maintains that “words can be chosen to activate desired frames”. In van Dijk’s socio-cognitive terms, such recurrent patterns of wording are best seen as lexicalizations of shared ideologies which guide the mental models students construct about human–environment relations, and once widely shared, become part of social cognition (van Dijk, 2023).

The former frame advances the religious identity of the State. It is a reproduction of the State’s ideology which emphasizes that “Islam and its teachings are our way of life. They are the basis of all our laws, decisions, actions and goals.” (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). The frame is triggered by the material process “Allah, glorified be He, has subjected the resources of nature”. The word ‘subjected’ is particularly revealing of that ideology, as it presupposes two roles—a dominant or more important actor and a subordinate or less important one—thereby legitimizing human exploitation of nature. This pattern also serves another function: it counters the prevalent Darwinian theory of evolution in Western education, which contradicts the religious identity of the State. God was mentioned as the Creator of the universe nineteen times. Framing environmental protection as a religious duty implies that as good Muslims, students must refrain from any activity that harms ecosystems. It also invokes emotions associated with the consequences of going against God’s will. This RELIGIOUS DUTY pattern also confers sanctity on the State’s involvement in environmental protection and legitimizes the State’s role in issuing environmental laws and apprehending environmental violators.

The second frame reproducing the State’s environmental ideology is NATURE AS RESOURCE, which appears fourteen times in the textbook. This is evident in the quote above, where ecosystems are explicitly constructed as “natural resources.” The argument presented for environmental protection is particularly revealing: it rests on the premise that protection is “the first option” because it is “less costly” than other available alternatives. Appeals to the authority of “scientists” and “research” further strengthen this argument and enhance its plausibility. Framed in this way, protection is not primarily a moral or ecological imperative but an economically rational choice. This encourages students to build mental models of nature as a utilitarian asset to be exploited rather than as a living system with intrinsic value. In van Dijk’s sociocognitive terms, such formulations contribute to situation models in which environmental issues are interpreted as economic cost–benefit problems.

The importance of ‘resources’ for human survival is further highlighted by presenting population growth as a mechanical response to resource levels as illustrated in the following example:

Romanized Arabic: *Wa-ghālīban mā tatanāfasu afrād al-jamā’a al-ḥayawiyya ‘alā al-maṣādir nafsihā, wa-idhā kānat hādhihi al-maṣādir kāfiya fa-inna al-jamā’a tastaṭī’u an tanmū. Wa-hunāka ghālīban ‘awāmil tamna’u al-jamā’āt al-ḥayawiyya min an tuṣbiḥa kabīra jiddan. Fa-mathalan, idhā izdāda numūw al-jamā’a ‘ammā tastaṭī’u al-maṣādir al-mutawāfira an tad’amahu, fa-inna ḥajm al-jamā’a yabda’u fī al-tanāquṣ ilā an yaqilla ‘adad al-afrād bi-ḥaythu tughattī al-maṣādir al-mutāḥa ihtiyājātihā.*

English translation: Individuals in a biological population often compete for the same resources. If those resources are sufficient, the population can grow. Other factors often prevent populations from becoming excessively large. For example, if population growth exceeds what the available resources can support, the population begins to decline until the number of individuals is low enough for the available resources to meet their needs. (p. 18)

The conditional “if ... then ...” pattern is deployed twice to express a neutral and seemingly objective causal relationship between the abundance of resources and the growth of the human population. The conditional clauses encode a simple, deterministic logic linking resources to population size. In van Dijk’s terms, such

conditional and causal relations are part of the local coherence and argumentation structures through which underlying ideologies make particular conclusions appear “natural” or “logical” (van Dijk, 1993b, 1995a). Students are invited to build mental models in which the growth of human communities is understood as an automatic response to resource availability, rather than as an outcome of social, economic, or political decisions. This directs them to see environmental issues primarily as management problems—how to keep resource use within limits so that growth continues. In sociocognitive terms, these mental models participate in the broader social cognition that reproduces the State’s environmental ideology, in which the environment is a resource to be optimized for sustainable development rather than a community with intrinsic value (van Dijk, 2005).

Repeated throughout the textbook, the NATURE AS RESOURCE frame can thus contribute to normalizing an environmental ideology in which conserving ecosystems is presented as obviously sensible mainly because it protects longterm economic interests and sustains “our” national development plans, rather than on explicitly eco-centric or moral grounds. Schultz (2001, p. 110) warns against using ‘resource’ framing, pointing out that “when something is labelled as a resource, it is implicit that it should or will be used or exploited in some way”. Framing animals, plants, water, soil, etc. as a ‘resource’ for biological communities diminishes their intrinsic value, implying they must be preserved to sustain certain biological communities. Labeling ecosystems as ‘resources’ presupposes exploitation, while religious framing legitimizes State intervention as necessary for survival. The two frames together construct mental models where the authoritative stewardship becomes both economically rational and morally obligatory. Consequently, the recurrent ‘resource’ frame structures the mental models through which students interpret environmental issues as economic problems, and, as these models become widely shared, they foster social cognition that normalizes an environmental ideology centered on resource management rather than intrinsic ecological value.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Saudi Vision 2030’s environmental ideology is constructed and reproduced in the Saudi secondary school *Ecology* textbook, using van Dijk’s sociocognitive CDA model and Stibbe’s ecolinguistic framework. The analysis of lexicalization, pronoun use, framing, and grammatical choices indicates that the textbook closely aligns with the State’s neoliberal–anthropocentric environmental perspective. The analysis of lexicalization, pronoun use, framing, and grammatical choices suggests that this alignment is realized through several recurrent discursive strategies, including repeated citation of Vision 2030 as an authoritative reference, the construction of an inclusive “we” that links the State with students, the parallel portrayal of generic “humans” as agents of environmental harm, and the personification of nature as a benevolent provider. In sociocognitive terms, these local lexical and grammatical choices shape the mental models of students about the environment, and as those models become widely shared, they contribute to a social cognition in which the State’s environmental ideology is viewed as both rational and morally justified.

The study is significant for curriculum designers and policymakers because it provides insight into how textbook discourse can reproduce environmental ideologies and shape students’ social cognition within educational institutions. For teachers and educators, it offers a way of looking critically at textbooks and considering how classroom practices might reinforce or challenge the stories students are invited to adopt about the environment. For ecolinguistics and education scholars, it provides a Saudi case study showing how a national transformation plan with strong environmental elements is translated into educational discourse.

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