

Ecolinguistics: Caring for Ecology Through TEFL

Dr. Arran Stibbe, University of Gloucestershire

Arran Stibbe is a professor of ecological linguistics at the University of Gloucestershire, England. He is a featured speaker at the upcoming Korea TESOL International Conference, where he will be speaking on "TEFL, Culture, and Environment: From Analysis of TEFL Textbooks to Inclusive Pedagogy." Dr. Stibbe has very graciously made himself available for this interview for The English Connection. — Ed.

KOTESOL: To start off this interview, would you please tell us a little about yourself?

Dr. Stibbe: Certainly. I'm a professor of ecological linguistics at the University of Gloucestershire, but I had quite an unusual journey to arrive at this point. Some points along this journey include studying computer systems engineering, then artificial intelligence, then natural language processing, then linguistics, then applying linguistics to health communication, and finally to ecological issues. During this time, I taught in the UK, South Africa, and, importantly for my international conference presentation, Japan for eight years.

KOTESOL: "Ecological linguistics." Could you explain just exactly what the field of ecological linguistics entails and how you became interested in this area?



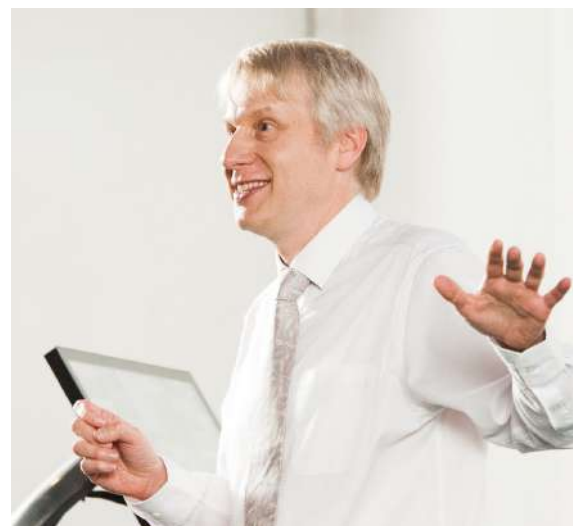
Dr. Stibbe: Certainly. For a long time, linguists have applied linguistics to crucial social issues like racism and sexism. This is based on the power of language

to promote prejudice or to encourage respect and care for others. Ecolinguistics simply extends this to consideration of future generations, animals, plants, and the physical environment. We are searching for inspirational forms of language that encourage people to respect and care for the ecosystems that life depends on. I became interested when living in Japan and speaking with elders who lived in the mountains – they were so respectful of all life and expressed this respect in inspiring ways.

KOTESOL: You are also the founder of the International Ecolinguistics Association. Please tell us a little about this association and its activities.

Dr. Stibbe: The International Ecolinguistics Association, at the time of writing this, has 997 members from around the world. By the time this article is published, we will have celebrated our 1000th member. The members are academics and research students who are committed to using linguistics to address some of the key issues that we face in the world, from climate change and the emergence of pandemics through the destruction of nature, to the positive impact

on wellbeing of spending time in nature. It's a wonderful community, and I'd like to invite readers to join (it's free, and you can find more at <http://www.ecolinguistics-association.org>). We also run a free online course, which has 2300 participants at the moment (www.storiesweliveby.org.uk).



KOTESOL: What are you planning for your conference presentation to be about, and how will it relate to our conference theme of "More Than Words: Teaching for a Better World"?

Dr. Stibbe: I am going to discuss my time in Japan, where I was gaining ecological wisdom from the elders in the mountains while also witnessing ecological destruction around me. I felt at the time that I wanted to include the environment in my TEFL classes but did not really know where to start. The environmental textbooks available were written by authors in the US and UK, and represented environmental issues in a trivial way rather than encouraging a deep respect for life. In fact, I analyzed the language of the textbooks to reveal hidden ideologies, which included ideologies of consumerism. In the end, I re-orientated my teaching towards getting the students to express the ecological wisdom in traditional Japan in English so that it could spread across the world.

KOTESOL: Using traditional wisdom to inform a newly emerging field – sounds a bit ironic but at the same time so logical. What would you like for the audience's take-aways to be from your conference session?

Dr. Stibbe: That for genuine ecological education it's important for students in Asia to treat the hidden messages in their TEFL textbooks critically, since they often contain consumerist ideology (even environmental textbooks can promote consumerism). And that a key aim of TEFL is to enable students to express ecological insights from their own traditional culture in English for the benefit of the world.

KOTESOL: Thank you, Dr. Stibbe. We look forward to listening to your presentation at the conference.