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FIGURATIVE NARRATIVES OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

Inna V. Skrynnikova

Volgograd State University, Volgograd, Russia

Tatiana N. Astafurova

Volgograd State University, Volgograd, Russia;
Volgograd State Technical University, Volgograd, Russia

Abstract. The current paper presents a comprehensive overview of numerous, frequently divergent, views of the concept of environmental security and stresses the resulting ambiguity in its interpretations across various types of discourse. This calls for the need to provide an overarching explanation of what environmental security is to be able to tackle environmental issues in the years to come. Given the complexity and the abstract nature of the term, it is the effective use of language resources that can be helpful in making sense of the environmental security and relevant mechanisms to ensure it. The paper argues that figurative language serves as a pervasive cognitive mechanism in interpreting and foregrounding the major aspects of sustainable “communication” with and about the environment. The focal point of the paper is the authors’ urge to search for an apt metaphorical narrative encompassing various aspects of environmental security as a single metaphor is hardly able to cover a myriad of interdependent relations in the course of human-nature interaction. The analysis of the recurring discursive metaphors (military, medical, care) to refer to environmental security has revealed their downsides in promoting an adequate view of the current threats and, thus, the lack of public awareness of the emergency actions to save the planet.

Key words: environmental security, ambiguity, figurative language, metaphor, metaphorical narrative, explanatory cognitive mechanism.

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ОБРАЗНЫЕ НАРРАТИВЫ ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

Инна Валериевна Скрынникова

Волгоградский государственный университет, г. Волгоград, Россия

Татьяна Николаевна Астафурова

Волгоградский государственный университет, г. Волгоград, Россия;
Волгоградский государственный технический университет, г. Волгоград, Россия

Аннотация. В статье представлен обзор многочисленных и часто расходящихся точек зрения на понятие «экологическая безопасность», выявлена возникающая в результате этого неоднозначность его интерпретации в различных типах дискурса. С учетом сложности и абстрактного характера термина, обозначающего это понятие, показано, что эффективное использование языковых ресурсов может помочь в осмыслении экологической безопасности и релевантных механизмов ее обеспечения. Доказан тезис о том, что образный язык служит универсальным глубинным когнитивным механизмом в интерпретации и выдвигании на первый план важных аспектов устойчивой интеракции человека с окружающей средой. В статье обоснована необходимость поиска корректного мультимодального метафорического нарратива,

охватывающего различные аспекты экологической безопасности, поскольку одна отдельно взятая метафора не способна передать всю многогранность взаимозависимых отношений в процессе взаимодействия человека и природы. В результате анализа рекуррентных дискурсивных метафор (военных, медицинских и др.) экологической безопасности установлены их недостатки в обеспечении адекватного взгляда на современные угрозы и, таким образом, в слабом информировании населения о необходимости экстренных действий по спасению планеты.

Ключевые слова: экологическая безопасность, неоднозначность, образный язык, метафора, метафорический нарратив, объяснительный когнитивный механизм.

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Introduction

The relation between the environment and the security of humans and nature has preoccupied numerous researchers across various disciplines, yet it has never taken the form we see today [Institute of Environmental...]. The progress of a growing environmentalism in developed countries after the 1960s brought environmental concerns to a global level in the 1980s. The environmental topics were related to the impact of surging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, land, along with rising sea levels in critical, overcrowded regions – developments that will prompt mass migrations and, in turn, incite group conflicts [Kaplan, 2000, p. 20].

In the late 20th century, the problems of interaction between nature and community became the subject of heated debate resulting in the distinction of three types of relations: the harmony of man and nature, the dominance of man over nature, the subordination of man by nature [Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 1994]. Subsequently, the main concerns of environmental issues were largely associated with population and resources [Dalby, 2002, p. 6].

The fears about the future and contemporary dangers [Dalby, 2002, p. 163] have given rise to the concept of security, which being an “elusive term” [McSweeney, 1999, p. 24], deals with threats to survival, a relative freedom from war... [Collins, 2022, p. 3] and prompts narratives of danger.

But the more traditional threats – which are primarily military – can also be environmental and have implications to environmental security as deepening and broadening, the security concept

is part of the evolution of the concept. As a consequence, the theme of environmental security is moving away from a state-centric approach to a global level, focusing on a range from the individual (human security) to entire systems (global security), linking environmental scarcity and conflict.

The historical background of the environmental security offers some of the major interpretations of this concept. The first one relies solely on human activity: when the latter affects the environment, we refer to it as ecological security. Such a view emphasizes that it is ecosystems and ecological processes that should be secured as human activity is the threat to ecological security. Humans are only secure in the way that they are merely a part of the environment [Collins et al., 2007, p. 461]. Another interpretation implies common security, i.e. the impacts of environmental issues over shadow borders to a global danger. In case of the ozone depletion or the climate change the problems are shared not in the sense that ‘we’ are all equally responsible for them but rather that we are at equal risk from them [Collins et al., 2007].

In the third millennium, major scientists are turning to a qualitatively new type of interaction between nature and society, giving rise to novel ecological narratives which highlight:

– the anthropogenic changes of the planet (industrial emissions and waste, carbon monoxide, destruction of the rainforest, fumes from vehicles, nuclear reactors and waste, oil spills at sea, chemical effluent, the greenhouse effect, the consumption of non-renewable energy and the use of non-biodegradable materials); the narrative suggests that it is ecosystems that should be secured as human activity poses a planetary threat to ecological security;

– climate change (global warming, sea-level rise; ice mass loss, shifts in flower/plant blooming; extreme weather events); the current climate change narrative is turning toward more human-induced / man-made climate change reawakening environmental concerns in the global public's minds;

– virus pandemics, the latest of which, the COVID-19, cost the lives of 15 million people worldwide; this viral narrative foregrounds the idea of “a hybrid warfare threat because humans carry and spread the virus which wages war against them” [Jakovljevic et al., 2020].

The aforementioned narratives have given rise to a new approach to social responsibility in relation to environment protection and security. Most people seem to be aware of what environmental security means and believe they contribute to it. But in global terms, the genuine environmental security lies not with a private individual, but with industry and big business. More in-depth insights into current ecological narratives have revealed the contested views of “environmental security”:

– safety of the natural environment and vital human interests from the possible negative effects of human industrial activities;

– safety of an individual, society and the state from potential or current threats posed by the consequences of daily environmental pollution;

– the sum of rules aimed at protecting the environment, rational use of natural resources, ensuring human rights to a healthy and favorable environment;

– preventing the looming threat of human environment deterioration and the biosphere as a whole [Zurlini, Müller, 2008].

The interpretations of ecological security above are far from being complete. Though the more exhaustive one is proposed by G.A. Atamanov who believes that ecological security is the state of ecosystem in which it does not cause social or anthropogenic system harm, as it has no impact on it, leading to its destruction and/or dysfunction [Atamanov, 2019]. Thus, environmental security is based on the sustainable development of sources of livelihood, health, and well-being, which are the basis of effective management of Corporation Earth [Environmental Security..., 2018].

The mechanism for ensuring environmental security, in our view, comprises economic,

humanitarian and legal aspects. Traditional forms of combating environmental threats and ensuring effective environmental recovery are complemented by some modern narratives of “deep ecology”, some of which are extremely “eco-fascist” and militarist in nature [Linkola, 1971]. In his opinion, “to save biodiversity, avoid a shortage of resources for the population, and preserve ecological stability, homo destructivus must reduce his population to a stable level on a planetary scale, by the death of weaker individuals from starvation or the agony of genocidal civil wars” [Linkola, 1971]. Therefore, Human is a “*tumor on Nature*” and without defeating them by starvation, he introduces a “*germ warfare phase to defeat Human completely*”. The introduction of an eco-fascist regime in which squadrons of “*green police*”, with freed from the “*ethical syrup*” consciousness, will take on the role of deciders/makers of the humanity's fate [Linkola, 1971].

Scope and methods

Similar to numerous abstract and predominantly contested concepts, environmental security is a source of considerable ambiguity both in the expert and layman communities. It encompasses different, sometimes diverging, interpretations, and, therefore, needs further explanation. This is where figurative language can serve as an explanatory tool to make sense of what environmental security is [Skrynnikova, 2020]. Figurative language has a strikingly critical role in providing the so called anchors of novel phenomena to familiar and shared ideas, and consequently language and culture. By anchoring researchers understand the means enabling people to grasp an unfamiliar event, not available from their embodied experience. People are repeatedly reported to be able to embrace the world solely through searching for ways to accommodate their beliefs to a certain set of facts about the way reality is expected to work [Schön, Rein, 1994]. When one anchors an object, they fit it into an existing system of classifications, by naming and establishing its relations to other objects in the system [Wells, 1987, p. 443]. Thus, anchoring “assists” the public to realize emerging risks by classifying and naming the threat, making the unfamiliar familiar [Washer, Joffe, 2006,

p. 2143]. The most powerful anchoring devices are metaphors as they provide an alternative framing for novel and abstract phenomena and serve to constrain the discourse [Van der Sluijs et al., 1998]. This is achieved by framing a topic in such a way as to foreground particular aspects of a problem over other possible interpretations [Nerlich, Kotevko, 2009].

The research focus of the current paper is to reveal how the various types of discourse (public, media/mediated, environmentalist, etc.) metaphorically represent environmental security and related concepts. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) what is the conceptual and inferential structure of the environmental security concept;
- 2) what is the repertoire of salient metaphors representing environmental/ecological security and what are the implications of applying them;
- 3) how the environmental communication is evolving to form apt metaphorical narratives and, therefore, prompt corresponding public responses to global environmental threats.

In terms of research methods, the paper applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) and conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) emphasizing the embodied nature of human reasoning about abstract concepts. The findings derive from a specialized corpus of environmental narratives found in public, environmentalist and media discourse the authors compiled (385 extracts comprising metaphorical word combinations). The British National Corpus (BNC) and American National Corpus (ANC) served as a reference corpora for the current study. The narratives in the corpus cover the period between the late 1980s and 2022. The sources of narratives range from newspaper articles to interviews with environmentalists and layman observations to statements of public figures involved in environmental management.

The innovative character of the paper lies in the fact that it argues in favour of the crucial role of metaphorical narratives in explaining the complex nature of environmental security by outlining how they evolve over time to foreground relevant aspects of dealing with environmental issues (climate change, overconsumption, industrial production waste, etc.). The authors claim that to provide for a more holistic view of the looming environmental dangers and encourage

people to take action, communication about human-nature interaction should rely on a set of congruent metaphorical narratives, rather than on a particular single metaphor.

Results and discussion

Metaphorical narratives of environmental security have undergone a considerable shift in recent years, ranging from a war on climate change to treating our planet as a patient, and, consequently, taking care of it (although with a touch of duty). Environmental security is a complex problem that involves multiple biological, physical, meteorological, geographical, chemical as well as political, economic, and social factors interacting with each other. Imagining the scope of the environmental security to be provided is a surreal task for most people. The sustainability of the people and the planet relies on the transformation of existing social, political, and economic systems in ways that enable all life to flourish. Klein urges a comprehensive system transformation with an eye to a “worldview based on regeneration and renewal” [Klein, 2014, p. 424]. Such kind of transformation requires people to put their lives and bodies on the frontlines to hamper extraction of resources detrimental to ecosystems.

A recurring theme in mass media and public discourse expectedly revolves around addressing environmental security. As our findings suggest, there is a strong tendency in the articles to linguistically represent causes to ensure environmental security in terms of war and conflict. The procedure of identifying and interpreting metaphorical expressions has enabled us to elicit the conceptual metaphor ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY ACTION IS WAR/CONFLICT. The examples below may shed some contextual light on how concepts from the domain of war were used to metaphorically structure expressions concerning climate action.

(1) ...Though, a good energy bill would help slow greenhouse gas emissions, provide some of the tools we will need to **fight the larger battle** and set the stage for bolder measures down the road (The Endesa);

(2) Altering building codes and encouraging the use of energy-efficient bulbs are some of the inexpensive yet effective ways **to combat global climate change** (The IEA);

(3) Chinese President Xi Jinping said the country will **fight a good battle against pollution** and push ecological civilization to a new level during a tone-setting meeting on **environmental protection** ending Saturday (China Council...);

(4) Until recently, China and India have been cast as obstacles, at the very least reluctant **conscripts**, in the battle against climate change. ...It's America – Donald Trump's America – that now looks like the laggard (The New York Times, 2017);

(5) I wish President Trump and his administration would recognize the health, economic and environmental benefits of tackling climate change. ...We should be more optimistic than ever about our ability **to lead – and win – the fight against climate change**" (The New York Times, 2022).

The proliferation of the war domain is further evidenced when we consider its centrality in other familiar topics in discourse, such as the war on terrorism, drugs, crime, poverty, and so on [Flusberg, Matlock, Thibodeau, 2017, p. 771]. The examples from our subcorpus all harness the emotive and persuasive effect of this domain, pitting climate change as a natural enemy against which tools, conscripts and leaders are mobilised.

A bulk of the metaphors identified as underlying the conceptual metaphor relate **ACTIVITY is FIGHTING**, a rich and dynamic system of metaphors by which the "topography" of fighting is extrapolated onto what are seen as analogous aspects of activity [Goatly, 2007]. Hence, purposeful activity that is expected to demand collective action and sacrifice may conjure up a so-called cognitive script [Charteris-Black, 2004]. It makes the idea of nations involved in a "battle" for environmental security perfectly legitimate. **ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY is WAR** enables a framing of unified and cooperative effort towards a common good not only in the examples but in the corpus as a whole (whether this common good is mainly located in our continued survival or in the economic benefits). Less obvious, however, is the exact nature of that which is being "fought". This is a crucial question with regards to the cognitive and discursive implications of the conceptual metaphor, since the structural roots of the problem are obscured [Atanasova, Koteyko, 2017] and a particular enemy is hardly designated. Most corpus instances of **ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY is WAR** metaphor occasionally describe a more sharply defined enemy, e.g. climate change, fossil

fuel industry, anthropogenic activities, excessive consumption.

Using the metaphor of war sparks people's imaginations to envisage a world without fossil fuels. War metaphor immediately names the enemy, predominantly the fossil fuel industry. As fossil fuels are so deeply embedded in everyday life, defeating this enemy will require transformations of existing systems, particularly the political and economic ones. People will need to fight to transform these systems to create a sustainable world in the face of entrenched enemies that often have access to both political and economic power.

Although war metaphors instill fear, trigger emotional responses, call for emergency actions to contribute to environmental security, there are those who oppose the war frame [Flusberg, Matlock, Thibodeau, 2018]. Unlike the wars against poverty, drugs, and crime, environmental wars hardly resonate with the public and motivate policy initiatives since military metaphors imply dramatic messages about death and destruction. Another argument against war metaphors in environmental communication is the fact that public enthusiasm for such conflicts tends to wither away over time. The fatigue associated with wars may be exacerbated by public awareness that figurative conflicts do not presuppose a clear path to victory or identify winners and losers. Such downsides of excessive militarization of the environmental security discourse have resulted in the continuing search for a more optimistic metaphor.

It was not until the late 1990s, when the notion of "environmental health" has made its way to environmentalism and ecology. The range of its application has extended from the level of an individual (clinical and veterinary medicine) and the population (epidemiology and public health) to that of ecosystems. This paved the way for an interdisciplinary field of research where the relations between human activities, social organisations, natural systems, and health are being continuously addressed. Currently, the notion of health and well-being is a major point integrating three highly overlapping areas of research: ecosystem medicine, geographical medicine, and conservation medicine.

The health metaphor is an extremely powerful discursive tool. It is broad enough to

encompass a variety of scientific approaches and is compatible with mechanic and organic worldviews. It not only facilitates the cooperation between natural, social, and medical scientists but also has an important communicative function for the general public as well. It provides a vocabulary of symptoms, syndromes, diagnostic indicators; and so on with which laypeople are already familiar as potential or actual patients and consumers of health care services [Rapport et al., 1998].

Over the last few years, the health metaphor has gained ground in ecological restoration. As Harris and Hobbs [2001] have noticed, the two emergent fields of ecosystem health and ecological restoration have the potential to complement one another comfortably:

(6) If we view the concept of ecosystem health as **the diagnostic toolbox** and ecological restoration as **the treatment toolbox** for the management of damaged ecosystems, there is clearly the potential for useful synergy” (The Online Library Wiley);

(7) The biggest lesson is that COVID-19 is more than an illness. It is a **symptom of the ailing health of our planet**. Humanity’s dysfunctional relationship with nature has caused this **wider disease** (The Time Journal);

(8) We can **heal the planet** if we set our mind to it (The Sustainability Times).

Similar to most metaphors, the health metaphor also falls short in some respects. Ecosystems will not, for example, visit a doctor with their complaints. They cannot announce that they are sick and then tell when they are feeling better. Moreover, in the case of ecosystems, there is more possibility of a conflict between the health of the whole and the health of the components than in the case of human organisms [Hammond, Holland, 1995, p. 285] that need to be treated and taken care of on an individual basis.

The more recent care/stewardship metaphor has made its way across the different types of discourse by comparing the Earth to a house/household where humans are seen as stewards whose responsibility and obligation is to take care of their household. Stewardship metaphor appears to be unifying and covers the notion that “humans’ moral concerns drive the protection of ecosystems” [Raymond et al., 2013]. It was as early as 1949 when Leopold

vividly referred to what is commonly known as the land ethic:

(9) We abuse land because we regard it **as a commodity** belonging to us. When we see **land as a community** to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect (The Aldo Leopold Foundation).

In applying this stewardship metaphor, one recognises that humans hold multiple values and concerns for nature, which derive from their affective and cognitive interactions with other species and ecosystems. Monetary considerations alone are not sufficient to drive environmental management [Ludwig, 2001], but rather, humans manage ecosystems out of moral concern for them.

The metaphorical references to the environment as a close relative we are expected to love unconditionally and take care of are becoming pervasive across various types of discourse. Pope Francis appealed in (10) for more sustainable and responsible environmental behaviour, and the policy is a vivid example of such kinship metaphor. The similar idea is further emphasised by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in (11):

(10) Our common home is **like a sister** with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us (The Laudato Si Website);

(11) As inhabitants of the earth, we are nourished and sustained by **Mother Earth** who provides us our food and all the resources for life. If she is healthy and well, we will be healthy and well. Our fates are intertwined (The Tzu Chi Foundation Website).

The premise for addressing environmental security in this argument is established by situating ourselves as the metaphorical beneficiary and caretaker of the natural world. As a result, this metaphor is both more comprehensive, suggesting a broad range of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, and less controversial, and may be easily dismissed by people who fail to acknowledge climate science.

As we have seen, every metaphor is restricted in range and relevance. Metaphors are like searchlights that highlight certain features while blocking out others. Consequently, each metaphor is true for certain purposes, in certain respects, and in certain contexts. As Sara Ebenreck has written, “Rather than proceed as if any one metaphor is

the finally correct metaphor, ethicists conscious of the constructive imagination at work in these basic metaphors might be more aware of the limits of any metaphorical construction and more open to the experiences and values embodied in alternate metaphoric constructions of the Earth" [Ebenreck, 1996, p. 14].

Conclusion

As evidenced above, communication about environmental security is rife with metaphorical narratives treated as extended metaphorical frames which employ archetypal plots and the shared cognitive structures of human beliefs, morals, motivations, goals, actions and events. Due to multi-faceted and ambiguous nature of the abstract concept of environmental security, making sense of it presents a challenge for non-expert communities. This is where metaphors come into play to explain the intricacies of environmental security and prompt the urgency to take action to prevent environmental hazards.

The repertoire of environmental security metaphors is rich and varied presenting a myriad of inferences to be made. Metaphorical narratives of environmental security are not stable but rather dynamic, reflecting the changing nature of human-nature interaction for the past decades. The most salient and recurring ones, as our data suggest, are military, health-related and care, ranging from a war on climate change to treating our planet as a patient, and, consequently, taking care of it. Each of these narratives implies a certain course of action to ensure the sustainable development of the planet. The war metaphors prompt unifying our efforts towards a common good, however who or what is "fought" is not obvious. Health metaphors suggest our planet is a patient suffering from numerous diseases while individuals and governments should serve as doctors and provide its effective treatment. Such framing is also problematic as ecosystems are not able to make an appointment with a doctor with their complaints. Thus, the conceptual and inferential structure of the environmental security is rather complex which leads us to believe an "ideal" metaphor, able to encompass its fundamental aspects, is non-existent. Relying on a particular metaphor can only focus our attention on certain environmental issues rather than help us take a

comprehensive look at what should be done to provide environmental security of our planet. We assume it is a set of coherent metaphors that can assist us in embracing the complexities of this abstract concept and contribute to building a constructive dialogue between individuals, governments and environmentalists to tackle environmental issues.

Therefore, the search for the one best and apt metaphor is not devoid of any pitfalls and can result in a perceptual effacement. The latter can be the case if a metaphor is no longer perceived as metaphor and is taken literally, so that we are unable to recognise what it represents. In order to prevent such one-sidedness, we should employ an image-rich multimodal metaphorical narrative comprising a set of coherent metaphors. This strategy would facilitate our "ability to act from a frame while cultivating awareness of alternative frames" [Schön, Rein, 1994, p. 207]. We should learn to take various metaphorical perspectives at a time to embrace multifaceted nature of environmental security and facilitate people's awareness of the common threat making them act accordingly.

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Information About the Authors

Inna V. Skrynnikova, Candidate of Sciences (Philology), Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Language Communication and Linguodidactics, Volgograd State University, Prosp. Universitetsky, 100, 400062 Volgograd, Russia, i.skrynnikova@volsu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2390-7866>

Tatiana N. Astafurova, Doctor of Sciences (Philology), Professor, Department of Foreign Language Communication and Linguodidactics, Volgograd State University, Prosp. Universitetsky, 100, 400062 Volgograd, Russia, pic@volsu.ru; Professor, Department of Linguistics and Intercultural Communication, Volgograd State Technical University, Prosp. Lenina, 28, 400005 Volgograd, Russia, mkk_2012@vgasu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1299-8109>

Информация об авторах

Инна Валериевна Скрынникова, кандидат филологических наук, доцент кафедры иноязычной коммуникации и лингводидактики, Волгоградский государственный университет, просп. Университетский, 100, 400062 г. Волгоград, Россия, i.skrynnikova@volsu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2390-7866>

Татьяна Николаевна Астафурова, доктор филологических наук, профессор кафедры иноязычной коммуникации и лингводидактики, Волгоградский государственный университет, просп. Университетский, 100, 400062 г. Волгоград, Россия, pic@volsu.ru; профессор кафедры лингвистики и межкультурной коммуникации, Волгоградский государственный технический университет, просп. Ленина, 28, 400005 г. Волгоград, Россия, mkk_2012@vgasu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1299-8109>