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Schneider-Mayerson, M., & Bellamy, B.R. (Eds). (2019). **An Ecotopian Lexicon**. University of Minnesota Press.

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Almost weekly, the news is filled with reports of natural disasters, forcing us to find new words for the destruction of our planet. As these disasters evolve, it gets more and more difficult to describe our current climate reality. Therefore, it is time to adapt our vocabulary to the Anthropocene. While the Anthropocene was proclaimed decades ago, society still struggles to adapt familiar attitudes and dichotomies to this new reality. With *An Ecotopian Lexicon*, Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy take on the challenge of responding to the Anthropocene by presenting “conceptual tools to help us imagine how to adapt and flourish in the face of socioecological adversity” (p. 2). Their response is based on language, a key component of sustainable societal change. The authors assert that: “There is little question that language reflects the material and conceptual worlds that we inhabit [...]” (p. 5). The authors of this book, thus, are operating at the intersection of ecocriticism and cognitive linguistics. This intersection, called Ecolinguistics, considers the social context in which language exists as well as the larger ecological context. It examines the role of language and discourse in describing, aggravating, and possibly alleviating environmental problems (Fill & Pez, 2017, p. 24).

The authors distinguish their work from other forms of Anthropocene terminology creation, by focusing on conceptual tools that generate hope for a better future. To convey the urgency of this lexicon, the authors refer to the future of the next generations. Referring to the current news about climate developments, they note that “doom and gloom” narratives prevail in public discourse. The task of this book, however, is to present “possibilities for the cultural maps of better futures” (p. 2). The authors argue that the Anthropocene will inevitably change the lives of future inhabitants of Earth and that this obliges us, the current generation, to make that change a positive one. We, therefore, have to adjust our way of life to create better futures for the generations to come. Through language, this lexicon aims to not only critique the (lexical) status quo but to provide “linguistic and conceptual tools for the collective construction of a future that is more just, equitable, pleasurable, and truly sustainable [...]” (p. 8).

The contributors to this work were asked to provide loanwords that can and should be integrated into the English language. The loanword, according to the authors, is an extremely useful relational linguistic category because the terms are borrowed from one language and used in another without being translated. In order to clarify each term, the contributors

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provide an introduction of the loanword as it is originally used alongside a description of its “ecological, ecopsychological, ecosocial, or ecopolitical potential” (p. 11). Each entry also includes examples of how this loanword might be used in English. The authors hope these loanwords draw attention to the world's linguistic and cultural diversity, broaden people's perceptions of environmental possibilities, and inspire similar projects, like this lexicon.

Within the contributions to this book, seven thematic areas emerge to which the proposed terms can be assigned. These categories include loanwords that range from more tangible terms such as greetings to more abstract ones that go beyond the human. Through these categories, the authors also enable the reader to take a different approach to navigating the lexicon. While maintaining the typical alphabetical order of a lexicon, the authors offer “Another Path” to reading the book. “Another Path” seeks to connect the proposed terms thematically. Thus, the structure of the lexicon incorporates one of the main goals of the book, namely showing alternative future paths through language.

The fact that we have to rethink our language in the Anthropocene fundamentally is demonstrated by the first entry of the lexicon, which is based on sound. Indicated by ~\*~ and pronounced: “Blow a stream of air lightly across the back of your hand” (p. 15), the reader is asked to notice how serious the authors of this book are about breaking down human/non-human dichotomies and thinking outside the box. Other loanwords that go beyond the human include *Nabual*, which originates in the Indigenous practice of nahualism according to which every human is born with an animal alter ego (p. 163). Likewise, the newly coined word *Fotminne* “foot memory”, describes “how place undergoes change through time as people, livestock, and wildlife traverse it” (p. 65). These terms aim to symbolize the interconnection of human and non-human life.

Terms like *Sila*, *Rén*, or *Nakaiy* have been borrowed from different cultures, indigenous languages, and beliefs, which is why it is important for the authors to address the risk of cultural appropriation. They stress that using loanwords from different cultures and beliefs should be viewed as an act of gift-giving to the English language, resulting in weaving communities together to make “English speakers obligated to return the favor with gratitude, respect, and equal moral consideration” (p. 9). These words prompt the reader to reflect on traditional Western beliefs and how valuable these loanwords are for our vocabulary in the Anthropocene. In symbolizing the life and traditions of Maldivian fishermen, the term *Nakaiy* reminds us to pay attention and listen to changes in Earth's systems. Other loanwords also target a change in mindset. While *Metahuman* calls for an ethical commitment to change, the word *Misneach* calls for a mindset of courage.

In sum, the book achieves a good balance between abstract and practical words. While abstract loanwords are more complex and would need more time to be incorporated into everyday language, practical terms such as *Gyebale*, a greeting that expresses an “appreciation for the contributions [the others] make towards the everyday work of living well together” (p. 92), are easily implemented and more “clear cut”. *Blockadia*, as environmental campaigning that aims to block certain projects such as the Keystone XL pipeline, describes direct action.

The lexicon successfully expands our English language use, despite the target audience's limitations and loan word complexity. Although the authors intend for the book to create a sense of wonder and possibility and that it be given to people as a holiday gift, they also acknowledge their niche readership at the beginning of the book: “[...] those of us paying



attention [to the projections of the climate crisis]” (pp. 1-2). It is likely that the readership of this book will consist primarily of people who are already deeply engaged with the climate crisis and are willing to adjust their linguistic habits, rather than the broader, non-academic public.

Still, the book encourages potential readers to buy or gift a copy of the book by donating the proceeds “toward a fund to support creative political and cultural interventions focused on addressing climate injustice [...]” (p. 10). The book’s visual representations of fourteen loanwords in addition to the artist’s statements in the middle of the lexicon, attractively connect linguistics with visual art. By combining praxis, theory, creativity, and blurring the lines between the human and non-human, the book itself is a material representation of the authors’ approach “[t]o make the most of this historical moment requires that all concerned, creative, and thoughtful people—including you, dear reader— play a role.” (p. 11).

In sum, the book productively addresses the prevailing feeling of helplessness in a world where the specter of environmental disaster and the pressure to imagine a sustainable future can feel paralyzing. It’s difficult to find a starting point when it comes to climate change action. *An Ecotopian Lexicon* urges that we start with language that foregrounds the challenges of the Anthropocene and questions how we use words every day.

## References

Fill, Alwin F., & Penz, H. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics*. Taylor & Francis Group.