A tale of two narratives in the midst of a biodiversity crisis: An imaginary of co-existence, natural diversity and abundance, or economic, utilitarian, value-free pragmatism?

Emile Farmer (SoK) – Presentation of research plan

With the media providing us with a constant flow of worrying messages and images about climate heating, ecological collapse and the sixth mass extinction, it can be difficult to envision a way out of our current predicament. However, many now criticise the proclivity of writers and the media to engage in apocalyptic narratives of environmental breakdown. Neimanis et al (2015) call for the environmental humanities to embrace a need for new, inspiring narratives regarding our relationship with the rest of the living world; stories that represent imaginaries that can perhaps galvanise our efforts through positive representations of how we can live in a state of ecological balance and kinship with the non-human other. Stibbe (2020) advances ecolinguistics as an approach to text and multimodal analysis that can both critique unhelpful narratives as well as search for positive stories that encourage us to protect the ecological foundations needed for life to prosper. One such imaginary that has gained some traction is the concept of rewilding. Organisations such as Rewilding Europe present persuasive visions for the rewilding of our lives and a new era of coexistence and tolerance of the non-human other, and with it the potential for a turnaround in the decline in wild animal populations and the biodiversity crisis. Meanwhile, in Sweden, the state-run forestry company Sveaskog has been criticised heavily by Greenpeace Sweden and Friends of the Earth for greenwashing and managing Swedish forests as forestry agriculture and for the maximisation of profit rather than ecological integrity at a time in which Sveaskog’s approach to forestry is presented internationally as an example of best practice. This study represents the first element within a two-part PhD project. This first part will then aim to carry out a comparative ecolinguistic analysis of the discourse employed by Rewilding Europe and Swedish state-run companies and agencies in charge of the Swedish natural environment in order to gain detailed insights into how they represent and present the living world and our relationship with it.