



The lexical system in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's short story collection "The Endless Field" from the perspective of ecolinguistics

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Abstract

This paper investigates the lexical system in the short story collection *The Endless Field* by writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu through the theoretical lens of Ecolinguistics—an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of linguistics and ecology. Utilizing statistical, classification, and semantic analysis methods, the study examines a total of 368 ecological lexical units, categorizing them into five distinct semantic fields: (1) Words denoting regional ecological space (17.12%); (2) Words denoting biological entities (42.39%); (3) Words denoting weather conditions (20.92%); (4) Words denoting ecological changes (8.70%); and (5) Words denoting human ecological impacts (10.87%). The findings demonstrate that this lexical system not only vividly recreates the riverine landscape of the Southern region and incorporates a dialect rich in regional identity, but also possesses high artistic efficacy in enhancing expressiveness and blurring the boundary between humanity and nature. Through this linguistic framework, the study highlights profound warnings about environmental degradation driven by rapid urbanization, while conveying a humanistic message regarding the symbiotic, sustainable harmony between humans and the ecosystem.

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, lexical system, The Endless Field, Nguyen Ngoc Tu, southern ecology

Introduction

Having emerged, existed, and developed for over half a century, ecolinguistics is still commonly known as a young discipline born from the intersection of linguistics and ecology. Moving beyond mere abstract theories or dry, over-formalized symbols, ecolinguistics addresses practical issues close to daily life within the interconnected relationship among language, humans, and the environment. This implies that language is utilized as a lens to reflect, perceive, and mirror objective reality or to describe linguistic phenomena; simultaneously, it serves to express human attitudes toward nature. On the other hand, it proposes methodologies aimed at protecting, maintaining, or potentially transforming the living environment. This has opened up a new approach in literary studies, enriching and deepening the analysis and decoding of literary works, particularly in examining imagery, vocabulary, and discourses related to natural ecosystems.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, writers have progressively become deeply aware of the need to innovate their creative mindset in both modes of expression and inspirational themes, aiming to recreate their own unique identity and individuality. Following the Doi Moi (Renovation) era, many authors shifted their focus toward everyday themes to gently touch upon nature, culture, and the human condition during this period. Driven by an inherent human preference, readers in an increasingly modernized society tend to find greater interest in what is primitive and possesses the most genuine essence. Understanding this psychology and drawing from a rustic life raised amidst the picturesque rural fields of the Southern region, Nguyen Ngoc Tu confidently wrote about the land and people of the Mekong Delta without seeking any far-off lands.

Right from her initial success with the short story "The Unextinguished Lamp", she impressed readers with a writing style that, while simple and rustic, carried a touch of modernity and captivatingly fresh perspectives. However, it was the distinctive mark of her short story collection "The Endless Field" that truly represented a breakthrough, bringing Nguyen Ngoc Tu's literature much closer to the public. In contemporary Vietnamese literature, Nguyen Ngoc Tu and her works emerge as a fresh, youthful wave, opening up intimate interactions among language, cognition, and the environment. Her work also taps into a vivid archive of culture and livelihoods of Southern people, which are currently at risk of fading away in the face of rapid urbanization. Under the author's authentic, sharp pen and her thorough application of Southern dialects, humans do not stand above nature but on an equal footing with it—where natural entities also possess thoughts, feelings, pain, and souls.

It is observable that while Nguyen Ngoc Tu's works have been extensively explored through various lenses such as ecological criticism, poetics, and cultural studies, the approach from the perspective of ecolinguistics remains open, leaving many research gaps. Grounded in these theoretical and practical foundations, this report focuses on exploring the lexical system in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's short story collection "The Endless Field" from an ecolinguistic perspective to clarify the characteristics, roles, and meanings of various vocabulary strata in expressing the author's artistic ideology. This approach also offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between humans and their living environment. Consequently, the report contributes to expanding and reaffirming the value of ecolinguistics in elucidating the diverse layers of meaning within the modern Vietnamese language.

Research Content

1. An Overview of Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics is a relatively new and youthful field, yet it has established distinct goals in both theoretical framework and practical application. The term "Ecolinguistics" gained widespread recognition primarily through the publication of the article "The Ecology of Language" by Norwegian-American linguist Einar Haugen. Under an ecological metaphor lens, Haugen defined the ecology of language as "the study of interactions between any given language and its environment". However, this environment encompasses the social and psychological environment of the language rather than merely the physical one. He emphasized solving environmental issues by pointing out the link between language and ideologies, while asserting the central role of applied linguistics in addressing environmental challenges.

Aligning with this view, the International Ecolinguistics Association describes that "Ecolinguistics explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment," while outlining the development goals and orientation for the discipline. First and foremost, it aims to develop linguistic theories where humans are considered an integral part of the ecosystems on which life depends. Therefore, it is essential to examine and evaluate the capacity to address and handle contemporary ecological issues, whether they concern climate change, ecosystem imbalance, biodiversity loss, or environmental degradation.

Ecolinguistics consistently centers its research on how humans understand and realize vibrant ecosystems through language. This is particularly crucial in the context of the climate crisis caused by direct human impacts, which have pushed these ecosystems to the brink of mass extinction. What, then, lies ahead for the future of ecolinguistics? Could there be impacts across various levels, which, as Mühlhäusler and Peter suggest, fundamentally stem from "the negative impacts of tourism" and "ecological changes caused by digital technology"? These include climate change, warfare, weapons manufacturing, and similar phenomena. Ultimately, driven by the developmental needs of individuals, collectives, and nations, humans are willing to trade environmental integrity for success, effectively gambling with their own habitat.

For this reason, ecolinguistics acts as a powerful tool to criticize and condemn negativity in the relationship between humans and the natural environment, as well as to warn against discourses that harm the surrounding natural world. Furthermore, ecolinguistics serves as a foundation for shifting social awareness, fostering voluntary preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity, and keeping indigenous knowledge tied to nature completely intact. In this way, ecolinguistics is not merely a mirror reflecting reality but also exerts a strong influence on the human mindset. From there, profound insights can be proposed regarding the harmony between language and the biosphere, directly promoting the sustainable development of the global ecosystem. Additionally, it should exist as a method to heal the fractures in human-nature relations by restructuring discourses to awaken ethical responsibility toward all things in every individual. Language possesses the power to inspire humans, but it can equally destroy or protect the ecological environment, depending heavily on the mindset, awareness, and actions of each individual.

The emergence of "ecolinguistics" represents an exploration of the relationship between language in literature and the natural environment. Sharing a deep alignment and interest in this field, writer Nguyen Ngoc Tu not only directs her pen toward human fates caught in the crisis of the Southern environment but also directly confronts environmental issues within her works.

2. The Ecological Lexical System in the Short Story Collection "The Endless Field"

In the contemporary Vietnamese literary forum, Nguyen Ngoc Tu stands out as a unique phenomenon—a female writer deeply imbued with Southern characteristics, who remains loyal to a simple, rustic writing style, and who consistently innovates her artistry. Remarkably, after more than twenty years in her writing career, Nguyen Ngoc Tu has never detached herself from her homeland; she continually directs her focus toward it, even if exploring it exhaustively has yet to yield definitive answers. Consequently, her works invariably utilize human suffering and losses to evoke the damage that nature must endure. Thus, environmental issues in the writings of this author from the river region appear as central characters, sighing over unpredictable fluctuations. To comprehend this deeply, we must penetrate and touch the linguistic shell to decode the entire aquatic ecosystem of the Western region. Examining the ecological lexical system in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's work, specifically analyzing the collection "The Endless Field", is a journey to find answers regarding the reciprocal relationship between linguistics and modern ecosystems.

The research corpus consists of 14 short stories within the collection "The Endless Field" by Nguyen Ngoc Tu. To achieve an objective, scientific, and comprehensive overview of the ecological vocabulary in the work, we classified and systematized words into shared semantic fields as shown in the statistical table below:

Table 1: Statistical Breakdown of Ecological Lexical Groups

No.	Ecological Lexical Groups in "The Endless Field"	Quantity	Percentage (%)
1	Lexical group denoting regional ecological space	63	17.12
2	Lexical group denoting biological entities	156	42.39
3	Lexical group denoting weather conditions	77	20.92
4	Lexical group denoting ecological changes	32	8.70
5	Lexical group denoting human ecological impacts	40	10.87
6	Total	368	100

As indicated by the data, the lexical group denoting biological entities accounts for the highest percentage (42.39%), followed by the group denoting weather conditions at 20.92%, and the group denoting regional ecological space at 17.12%. Ranking fourth is the group denoting human ecological impacts (10.87%), and finally, the group denoting ecological changes accounts for 8.70%. These figures vividly portray the life portrait that Nguyen

Ngoc Tu intends to convey, where nature, environment, and humans appear densely, tightly bound, and full of vitality. Specifically:

- **Lexical group denoting regional ecological space (63 terms):** *cù lao* (islet), *ngã ba Vàm* (Vam three-way intersection), *nắm đất* (mound of earth), *gò đất* (earthen hillock), *bãi bồi* (alluvial flat), *bờ râm bụi xanh* (green hibiscus hedge), *mé rừng* (forest edge), *bìa rừng* (forest fringe), *vạt rừng* (forest strip), *rừng xanh* (green forest), *rừng* (forest), *cánh rừng tràm lớn* (large melaleuca forest), *cánh đồng lúa lơ thơ* (sparse rice field), *cánh đồng lúa vừa mới chín* (just-ripened rice field), *cánh đồng khơi* (open field), *cánh đồng ủ tê tin buồn* (field brooding with sad news), *cánh đồng Chia Cắt* (Divided Field), *cánh đồng Bất Tận* (Endless Field), *cánh đồng vắng ngắt* (deserted field), *những cánh đồng* (fields), *những cánh đồng hoang lạnh* (cold wild fields), *cánh đồng rộng* (wide field), *cánh đồng không có tên* (nameless field), *cánh đồng vắng người* (unpeopled field), *cánh đồng hoang vắng* (desolate field), *chòi ruộng* (field hut), *ven các bờ ruộng* (along the paddy dikes), *bờ bên kia sông Bìm Bịp* (the far bank of Bim Bip River), *sông Cà Lớn* (Cai Lon River), *Giang* (Giang River); *khúc sông* (river section), *vàm sông* (river mouth), *vàm* (estuary), *sông nước* (river waters), *dòng sông* (river current), *dọc những triền sông* (along the riverbanks), *bến sông* (river wharf), *con sông Dài* (Dai River), *sông* (river), *mé kinh Chiềc* (edge of Chiec canal), *cuối vàm con kinh* (the end of the canal mouth), *đôi bờ kinh chơ vơ* (lonely canal banks), *cạnh mé mương* (beside the ditch), *mương cống* (sluice ditch), *cái mương cạn* (shallow ditch), *rãnh con nước* (clear water current), *con đường kinh xao xác* (rustling canal path), *con kinh* (canal), *ở đáy con sông* (at the river bottom), *con rạch* (rivulet/creek), *con nước kém* (neap tide), *con nước rong* (spring tide), *con trạch* (creek channel), *con kinh nhỏ nằm vắt qua* (small canal crossing over), *con kinh khô trơ lòng* (dried-up canal bed), *ao* (pond), *ao bèo cuối hẻm* (duckweed pond at the alley end), *một cái ao* (a pond), *cái ao bông súng* (water lily pond), *ao rau muống* (water spinach pond), *vườn cây* (orchard), *vườn chuối* (banana grove), *những rặng vườn* (orchard rows), *biển* (sea).

This group constructs a specific ecological setting characteristic of the Mekong Delta. Through it, readers can visualize the Western river region with its intricate network of rivers and canals, vast expansive fields, or wild lands tightly bound to human livelihoods. Within ecolinguistics, this constitutes the foundational vocabulary stratum confirming the natural environment's role in sustaining human life.

- **Lexical group denoting biological entities (156 terms):** *cây cỏ* (flora/vegetation), *cỏ mực* (false daisy), *cỏ lúa* (rice-field weeds), *cỏ* (grass), *cỏ xanh* (green grass), *đám cỏ dày* (thick grass patch), *bông cỏ* (grass flower), *cỏ ướt đầm sương* (dew-drenched grass), *bụi cỏ ống* (torpedo grass bush), *bụi rạ* (stubble clump), *bụi ráng* (fern bush), *bụi lúc đại* (wild Indian pluchea bush), *cây* (tree), *hàng cây đùng đĩnh* (row of fishtail

palms), *cây xanh* (green tree), *mấy cây me già* (a few old tamarind trees), *xoài cát trái mùa chín son* (off-season ripe red Cat mangoes), *ba đám lá dày* (three patches of thick foliage), *dấp cá với húng lủi* (fish mint and mint), *gốc cây vú sữa đã già* (old star apple tree base), *cây tra* (mangrove apple tree), *cây đước* (mangrove tree), *cây sào neo* (anchor pole), *gốc điệp già* (old poinciana base), *ngọn đước* (mangrove top), *những ngọn tre già* (old bamboo tops), *ngọn cây* (treetop), *cây gòn* (kapok tree), *cây mắm* (black mangrove tree), *cây bình bát* (pond apple tree), *cây vòng nem* (indian coral tree), *cây quao cụt* (stumped mangrove trumpet tree), *đám bìm bìm* (morning glory patch), *đống rom dập dềnh* (floating straw pile), *vết xanh ròn của dừa* (vibrant green streak of coconuts), *lá dừa khô* (dry coconut leaf), *mớ cọng dừa* (bundle of coconut midribs), *vỏ dừa khô* (dry coconut husk), *ngọn dừa* (coconut top), *đám dừa nước* (water coconut patch), *triền dừa nước xanh* (green water-coconut bank), *đọt dừa* (coconut heart), *dừa nước* (water coconut), *rặng dừa xanh thẫm* (dark green coconut row), *dừa khô* (dry coconut), *trái dừa tươi* (fresh coconut fruit), *những thân dừa chẻ hai* (halved coconut trunks), *rau muống* (water spinach), *bó rau ngót* (bundle of star gooseberry leaves), *rau trái* (vegetables and fruits), *sân bèo* (carpet of duckweed), *bèo* (duckweed), *bèo lấm tằm xanh* (speckled green duckweed), *lá dứa* (pandan leaf), *mé lá* (leaf edge), *chiếc lá me* (tamarind leaf), *lá rau* (vegetable leaf), *vài ba con cá rô* (two or three climbing perch), *con cá ốm nhom* (skinny fish), *con cá* (fish), *con cá ươn* (stale fish), *cá thòi lòi* (mudskipper), *con cá nhỏ* (small fish), *con cá thát lát* (bronze featherback), *bầy vịt ngoi quây* (floundering duck flock), *tụi vịt đạp đầu chen nhau* (ducks trampling and crowding each other), *bầy vịt no căng lườn* (full-breasted duck flock), *bầy vịt lúc nhúc* (swarming duck flock), *những con vịt đói* (hungry ducks), *nhóp nhóp* (slimy/sticky); *bầy vịt tao tác kêu* (frantically squawking duck flock), *bầy vịt* (duck flock), *những con vịt đã già, đã đẻ quàn quật suốt ba mùa trước* (old ducks that laid exhaustively through the past three seasons), *đàn vịt* (duck herd), *con vịt ốm nhằng* (scrawny duck), *bầy vịt nhạy cảm* (sensitive duck flock), *con vịt trống* (drake), *rắn độc* (venomous snake), *rắn* (snake), *rắn mối* (sun skink), *rắn hổ đất* (monocled cobra), *rắn bông súng* (keelback snake), *chim* (bird), *con bò* (cow), *chuồn chuồn* (dragonfly), *con cò cò* (egret), *con bìm bịp* (coucal), *chó* (dog), *mèo* (cat), *chim chóc* (birds), *sáo* (myrna), *cóc* (toad), *con mèo mướp* (tabby cat), *con khỉ* (monkey), *con ong* (bee), *ba khía* (mangrove crab), *con bướm nhỏ* (small butterfly), *con chó Phèn* (Phen the dog), *chim cú* (owl), *liếp tràm bông vàng* (row of yellow-flowered melaleuca), *bông giấy rụng* (fallen bougainvillea), *lục bình* (water hyacinth), *cọng rạ* (straw stalk), *gốc cây cồng già cóc già kiết* (gnarled base of an old rain tree), *bông sao nhái* (cosmos flower), *bông mười giờ* (moss rose), *bông bụp* (hibiscus flower), *bông trang* (ixora flower), *rau ngổ* (rice paddy herb), *tàu rêu* (moss layer), *rẫy bí* (pumpkin plot), *rẫy khóm* (pineapple plot), *sào đậu* (bean pole), *bông* (flower), *gốc tra bông*

(flowering mangrove apple base), *cái hoa con con* (tiny flower), *bông tra vàng* (yellow mangrove apple flower), *cái bông* (the flower), *cái hoa nắng vàng* (yellow sunlight flower), *binh bát* (pond apple), *hoa cỏ dại* (wildflower), *chùm bông vàng* (yellow cluster), *buồng chuối chín* (ripe banana bunch), *buồng chuối già hương* (bunch of aromatic old bananas), *tàu lá chuối* (banana frond), *tàu chuối héo* (withered banana frond), *trái cá* (fish fruit), *trái khóm* (pineapple), *trái bí* (pumpkin), *bầu* (gourd), *bí rợ* (squash), *khoai lang* (sweet potato), *củ ấu* (water caltrop), *trái bầu khô* (dry gourd), *trái nhàu nhàu* (noni fruit), *trái khế* (starfruit), *chuối hột* (wild seeded banana), *đất đỏ* (red dirt), *mảnh ruộng miêng vườn* (plot of field and garden), *vườn rộng* (spacious garden), *ruộng cũng nhiều* (plentiful rice fields), *đất đồng* (field soil), *đất* (earth/land), *đất vườn* (garden soil), *cục đất* (clod of earth), *đất thiêng của ta* (our sacred land), *đất thương* (beloved land), *đất nhớ* (remembered land), *đồng đất trống trơn* (empty fields), *hat gạo* (rice grain), *lúa* (rice plants), *lúa chết khô khi mới trở bông* (rice plants withered dry right at panicle initiation), *bông lúa khô quắt queo trên đồng* (shriveled dry rice ears on the field), *lúa vừa chín tới* (just-ripened rice), *lúa rầy mọc hoang* (wild volunteer rice), *những cây lúa chết non* (prematurely dead rice plants), *hàng tre* (bamboo row).

The inclusion of these biological terms infuses Nguyen Ngoc Tu's artistic world with exceptional vitality. They demonstrate biodiversity within the ecosystem and express the inner psychological life of humans. Various plants and animals have long since evolved into symbols for love, sorrow, joy, or the human condition itself.

- **Lexical group denoting weather conditions (77 terms):** *mưa lâu tạnh hột* (persistent rain), *mưa gió lớn* (heavy rain and wind), *trời đổ mưa* (rain pouring down), *mưa mà vẫn nắng chang chang* (raining under blazing sunshine), *con mưa mùa ràn rạt* (rustling seasonal downpour), *mưa nắng* (rain and sun), *mưa mùa đã mênh mông nước* (seasonal rain flooding the landscape), *trời mưa* (rainy sky), *tiếng mưa long tong* (dripping sound of rain), *mưa ướt mem* (soaking rain), *một mùa mưa dài* (a long rainy season), *mùa mưa vẫn còn xa lắm* (the rainy season is still far off), *con mưa buổi xế chiều* (late afternoon shower), *mưa giăng bốn bề* (rain curtaining all sides), *mùa mưa sang nắng rồi lại mưa* (rainy season turning to sunny then back to rain), *mưa vào mùa* (seasonal rain arrival), *nắng trưa* (midday sun), *mặt trời vừa khuất* (the sun just dipped below), *những tia nắng đỏ cuối cùng* (the last red sun rays), *cuối nắng* (fading sunlight), *buổi chiều còn nắng* (sunny afternoon), *mùa nắng* (dry/sunny season), *ánh nắng chiều* (afternoon sunlight), *nắng ráo* (drying sunshine), *nắng* (sunlight), *nắng lá rụng tả tơi* (sunshine making leaves shed raggedly), *ngó nắng* (watching the sunlight), *nắng nhuộm đời* (life-dyeing sunlight), *nắng vẫn chênh vênh* (sunlight remaining precarious), *nắng rất dài* (lingering sunlight), *ánh mặt trời* (sunlight), *nắng vờ vàng* (pallid/faded sunshine), *nắng rung rung ngoài sân* (glistening sunlight in the

yard), *nắng hiu hiu* (faint sunshine), *nắng giữa trưa nóng rát* (scorching midday sun), *nắng dữ dằn* (fierce sunshine), *nắng héo xèo* (witheringly hot sun), *nắng như tát lửa* (sunlike slapping fire), *mặt trời* (the sun), *mùa còn ướt lạnh dài dài* (prolonged wet and cold season), *trời trở chướng* (the weather turning to Chướng winds), *trời khuya sâu hun hút* (deep, endless night sky), *trời mát rượi* (pleasantly cool sky), *trời hầm hập nóng* (sweltering hot weather), *trời chạng vạng* (twilight sky), *trời* (sky/weather), *trời mây nước* (sky, clouds, and water), *trời đất ảm đạm* (gloomy sky and earth), *bầu trời im ỉm* (silent dark sky), *gió ráo hanh* (dry, crisp wind), *gió te tái* (hurrying wind), *gió vút vút* (whistling wind), *gió chướng non xập xờn* (flickering early Chướng wind), *gió lùa lao xao* (rustling incoming wind), *gió lại đổi mùa* (wind changing seasons again), *gió* (wind), *gió ủa về* (rushing wind), *bữa gió dầm dề* (prolonged windy day), *mùa gió* (windy season), *gió lồng lộng trên đầu* (roaring wind overhead), *những cơn gió Đông cồn cào* (restless East winds), *gió hui hút* (chilling wind), *gió hoang liêu* (desolate wind), *gió quất điên cuồng* (wildly whipping wind), *gió lay lắt* (faltering wind), *gió chướng trở ngọn* (Chướng wind changing direction), *mây* (clouds), *mùa lúa* (rice season), *mùa gió chướng ngọt ngào* (sweet Chướng wind season), *mùa hạn hung hãn* (fierce drought season), *mùa đến sớm* (early-arriving season), *mùa lúa chín* (ripe rice season), *mùa khô* (dry season), *đêm tối nhanh chóng ập xuống* (night rapidly falling), *sao đêm* (night stars), *trăng rạng rỡ trên đầu* (radiant moon overhead), *bão toì bời* (destructive storm), *sấm chớp* (thunder and lightning), *bão* (storm).

This terminology group captures the seasonal and temporal transitions of nature. Weather functions as more than a background setting; it directly influences human attitudes and moods. Carrying high expressive weight, these terms underscore the dominance of natural cycles and demand adaptation and harmonious coexistence from humans.

- **Lexical group denoting ecological changes (32 terms):** *mọc thêm chùng chục quán nhậu* (sprouting about a dozen drinking joints), *lở đất* (landslide/erosion), *mùi thành thị quen thuộc* (familiar urban smell), *lửa táp vô vách đá* (fire lapping against stone walls), *nhà cháy trụi* (house burned to the ground), *thân cây lúa chết non trên đồng* (prematurely dead rice stalks on the field), *đốt cháy nham nhở* (raggedly burned), *đất khỏi lở* (preventing soil erosion), *những đám khói khét lẹt, đen ngòm* (acrid, pitch-black smoke plumes); *thứ nước chua lét vì phèn* (highly acrid alum-laden water), *thiếu nước* (water scarcity), *mặt nước váng phèn* (alum-filmed water surface), *nước đã sặc lại, thâm một màu vàng ảm* (water condensed into a dark, gloomy yellow), *dịch cúm gia cầm* (avian influenza/bird flu), *bị chôn sống* (buried alive), *đồng sau bão* (post-storm fields), *không có nước* (absence of water), *ngày càng khó tìm lúa và cám trong máng thức ăn* (increasing difficulty finding rice and bran in feeding troughs), *vàng khói mơ màng* (dreamy smoke veil), *khói bay mù mịt trong nhà* (smoke filling the

house), *mùi vải, mùi nhựa cháy khét lẹt* (acrid smell of burning cloth and plastic); *cá chết* (dead fish), *bầy vịt lặn ra chết gió* (ducks dropping dead from sudden illness/bad wind), *những cánh đồng trở thành đô thị* (fields turning into urban zones), *những cánh đồng ngoa ngoắt thay đổi vị của nước* (fields deceitfully altering the taste of water), *những cánh đồng vắng bóng người* (fields devoid of human presence), *những cánh đồng đã hất hủi cây lúa* (those fields having rejected the rice plant), *đất dưới chân chúng tôi bị thu hẹp dần* (the land beneath our feet gradually shrinking), *người ở đây lại không có nước để dùng* (the locals having no water for use).

This group documents fractures, degradation, or disruption within the habitat. It highlights how climate crises induce severe ecological shifts alongside aggressive urbanization waves. This prompts cognitive adjustments, delivers sharp environmental warnings, and directs readers toward sustainable living.

- **Lexical group denoting human ecological impacts (40 terms):** *súc lu* (scrubbing water jars), *hứng nước* (collecting rainwater), *cuốc đất* (tilling the soil), *trồng rau* (planting vegetables), *hái xoài chín* (picking ripe mangoes), *câu cá* (fishing), *soi ếch* (hunting frogs by lamplight), *chăn vịt* (herding ducks), *nuôi vịt chạy đồng* (raising free-range ducks across fields), *dựng lều* (pitching huts), *lùa vịt* (driving ducks), *phơi cá* (drying fish), *hái trái ô rô* (picking holly-leaved mangrove fruits), *rắn cắn* (snakebite), *trộn thức ăn cho vịt* (mixing duck feed), *dọn cỏ quanh chòi* (clearing weeds around the hut), *lùa vịt ăn mót một đổi đồng* (driving ducks to scavenge remaining grains across field sections), *đi mua nước ngọt bằng xuồng chèo* (paddling a sampan to buy freshwater), *nín thở để nước khỏi sánh ra ngoài* (holding one's breath to keep water from spilling), *xuồng ao tắm tấp* (going down to the pond to bathe), *nước vo cơm dùng để rửa rau* (using rice-washing water to rinse vegetables), *rửa rau xong dành rửa cá* (saving vegetable-rinsing water to wash fish), *con nít ba tuổi đã biết quý nước* (three-year-old children already knowing how to cherish water), *trồng đậu* (planting beans), *trồng dưa* (planting melons), *cắm lều* (setting up camp), *cắm vịt* (confining ducks), *lấy nước từ tất cả các dòng sông nhỏ, các con kinh* (drawing water from all small rivers and canals); *bơm vào rừng* (pumping water into the forest), *chống cháy* (preventing fire), *bắt con cá rô lội xuống mương* (catching a climbing perch wading in the ditch), *trước lá dừa thắt cào cào châu chấu* (stripping coconut leaves to weave grasshoppers), *nhìn bướm bay* (watching butterflies fly), *nhìn mây trôi* (watching clouds drift), *nghe bìm bịp kêu* (listening to the coucal's call), *xẻ máy cây đổ* (sawing structural timber pieces), *rải vôi trên những hố chôn lớn* (spreading lime over mass burial pits), *tọng những con vịt còn sống vào bao tải, buộc miệng và quăng xuống* (stuffing live ducks into sacks, tying the tops, and tossing them down), *dồn tất cả vịt trên cánh đồng lại và đào hố chôn* (herding all ducks on the field together and digging pits to bury them).

This group showcases human mediation and relief efforts amid environmental crises. It exposes ecological fractures where all entities must struggle through severe survival adaptation. This layer reflects the dialectical link between humans and nature : nature encompasses humanity, while human actions dictate the sustainability or collapse of the environment.

In brief, the survey and statistical breakdown confirm the prominent role of ecolinguistics in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's literature. Through the effective application of this vocabulary system, she dissolves the boundary between humanity and nature, assigning shared destinies to all living creatures. Beyond descriptive utility, this system demonstrates respect for nature rooted in self-awareness regarding human-environment interdependence. It shapes the distinct identity of the Southern aquatic culture—poetic yet marked by sorrow rooted in human indifference rather than historical warfare.

3. Artistic Efficacy of the Ecological Lexical System in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's Works from an Ecolinguistic Perspective

3.1 Establishing an Artistic Space Rich in Regional Flavor

Infusing her pages with the essence of the Southern land, Nguyen Ngoc Tu demonstrates a deep connection to her homeland and the life within it. Ecolinguistics is woven into her narratives to establish an authentic, vivid artistic space. Right from the title, "The Endless Field" introduces an immense, boundless expanse. "Field" (*cánh đồng*) is an evocative ecological term that represents regional landscapes and links directly to human livelihoods and destinies in the Mekong Delta. Paired with "endless" (*bất tận*), it generates a sense of vast, desolate indefiniteness.

The "field" symbol recurs with variations: shifting from a fertile, boundless expanse to fields described as "cold and wild," "deserted," or "everlasting," accompanied by faltering winds and sizzling heat. This evolution captures the specific geography of the Southwest while mirroring shifts in human emotions and daily states of mind. This vivid canvas relies on everyday imagery drawn from careful observation, including foraging duck flocks, firewood dried immediately after rains, or fields that alter the taste of water. These elements preserve the rhythms of Southern rural life.

Locals bear direct impacts from environmental shifts, particularly climate change. Human routines depend on natural cycles—moving or adapting according to dry or flood seasons. Personal exposure since childhood provided the author with a realistic view of rural hardships under environmental strains. Images such as alum-sour water, land erosion, or fields converted into urban developments populate her stories. They expose harsh realities while conveying deep empathy for human lives governed by shifting natural environments.

3.2 Everyday Language Imbued with Regional Identity

Nguyen Ngoc Tu remains one of the few contemporary writers preserving authentic Southern expression. As she noted: "For me, the language and atmosphere of the South have permeated my being from my living environment.

Unlearning it now would not be easy." Consequently, she applies ecolinguistics and Southern dialects by naming objects according to local riverine habits and everyday speech. Terms like *cuối vàm con kinh* (the canal mouth end), *con rạch* (rivulet), and *chòi ruộng* (field hut) act as markers of regional identity, enriching the text's linguistic fabric. Dialects fit naturally into character dialogues and monologues: Srông observes *váng phèn* (alum film), Hau references *ba khía* (mangrove crabs), and ducks *tắm táp* (bathe) in the river. This reflects her respect for rustic regional life and its people.

To her, humans and nature share equal value, expressed through the native vernacular of the Western fields. Southern dialects appear with high density, drawn directly from daily routines. The inclusion of local modal particles creates an intimate, conversational tone. Her gentle, reflective narrative style allows the ecological vocabulary to integrate smoothly. Words common in daily conversation take on distinct literary appeal because they are positioned to maximize their semantic potential.

3.3 Enhancing Expressiveness and Ecological Depth

The ecological vocabulary relies on artistic devices focused on biological entities and natural landscapes, investing inanimate objects with a sense of inner life. Simile, personification, and metaphor enhance expression, making the descriptions realistic and reflective of human struggles. Nature is compared against familiar human contexts: a dying rice plant carries an unfallen blossom, and post-storm fields reflect complete desolation.

Attributing human qualities to nature mirrors internal psychological states and underscores human isolation within large spaces. Rows of trees move at a leisurely pace, and faded sunlight takes on a vibrant quality. Metaphor expands symbolic meaning; nature shifts from literal representation to a vehicle for reflection on life. A bird's faint call conveys loneliness, while the field symbolizes human vulnerability alongside hope for the future. These artistic devices add layers of meaning to her ecological vocabulary. Natural imagery transitions into an expression of human emotion, building a closer connection between humanity and the environment.

3.4 Warning Against Reality and Conveying Humanistic Messages

The ecological vocabulary reveals the author's concerns regarding environmental degradation and human indifference toward the habitat. Human attention often turns to these issues only when daily routines face direct disruption. Parched fields, water scarcity, and disease outbreaks among livestock underscore a rift between nature and human communities. Rapid urbanization and modern developments continue to displace the original ecosystems of the West.

Amidst these pressures, the narrative provides a broader ecological message regarding human-nature harmony. It stresses the importance of respecting natural cycles and addressing environmental damage constructively. The author encourages a shift from instinctual environmental interaction to conscious ecological responsibility, aiming to mend rifts through mutual understanding. The vocabulary system supports this intent by underscoring the connection between human communities and the environment.

Language serves as a reflection of human thought, and her narratives utilize plain, regional vocabulary to capture the flavor of the river orchards within an extensive ecological lexicon.

Conclusion

The ecological lexical system in Nguyen Ngoc Tu's works, particularly in "The Endless Field", forms an integrated structure that reinforces her literary voice while preserving elements of Western riverine culture. Her linguistic framework functions both to describe reality and to prompt reflection. It highlights the vulnerabilities of natural entities under environmental pressures.

Historically, nature has remained essential to sustaining human society and planetary balance. As part of this shared ecosystem, threats to environmental stability translate into risks for human communities. This reality guides the author's focus toward natural cycles and the long-term consequences of human intervention within the habitat. This vocabulary encourages readers to re-examine their relationship with nature, supporting conservation efforts to protect ecosystems from disruptive impacts. Ecolinguistics contributes to addressing global environmental challenges, and the discipline is poised to offer valuable frameworks for future linguistic research.

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