American Concepts of "green"

Hilary Dees
Kansas State University

"It appears that **green** is a term that has become increasingly vague, at worst representing a self-defined symbol for those opposing perceived environmental transgressions with little thought into the practicality of such language and even less thought into the intellectual consequences of creating and using words in a way to describe a field in which intellectual rigor is required"

-Derek Wall

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- What does it mean to *go* green?
- Why green?
- Is green good everywhere?

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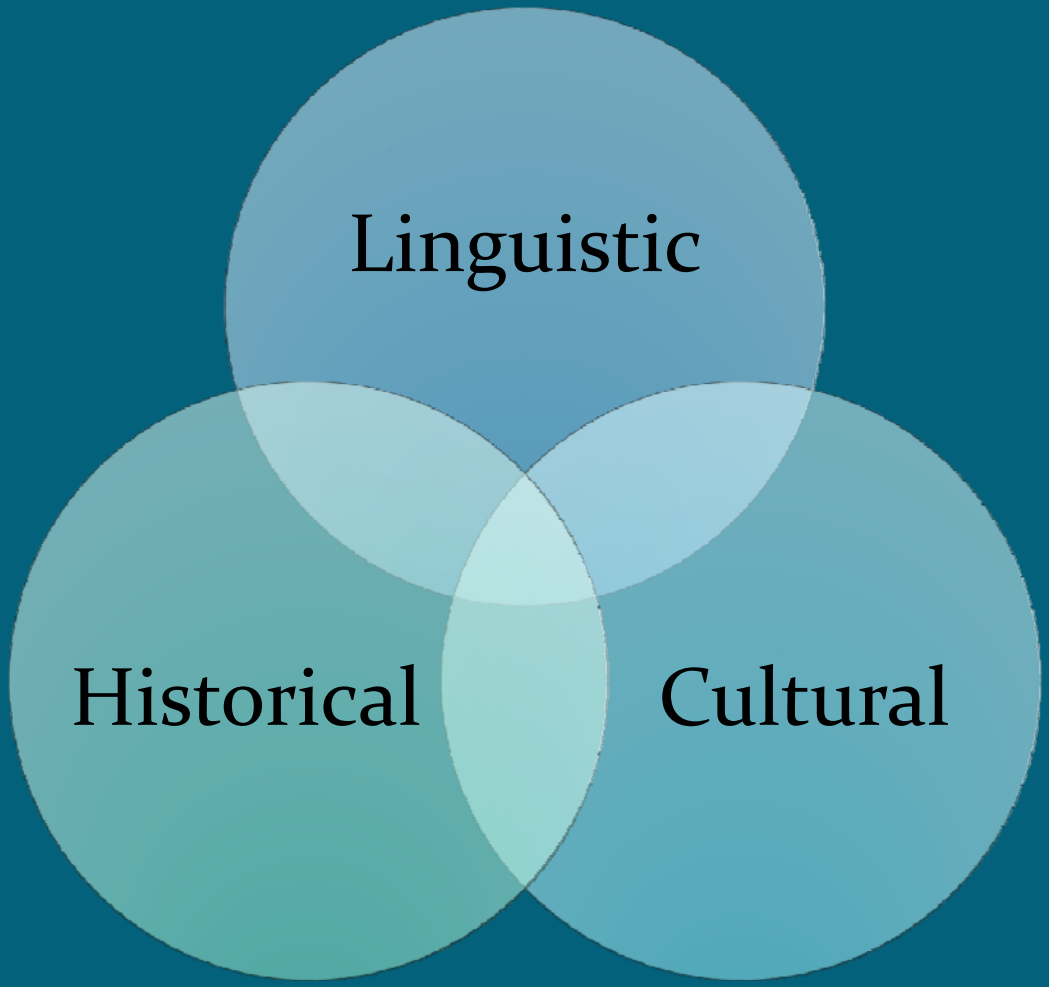
Linguistic
Historical
Cultural

Linguistic framework

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  - Language and world are regarded as mutually interrelated
  - Languages and their environments form open, dynamic systems

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GREEN PARTY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Ten Key Values of the Green Party

1. Grassroots democracy
2. Social justice and equal opportunity
3. Ecological wisdom
4. Non-violence
5. Decentralization
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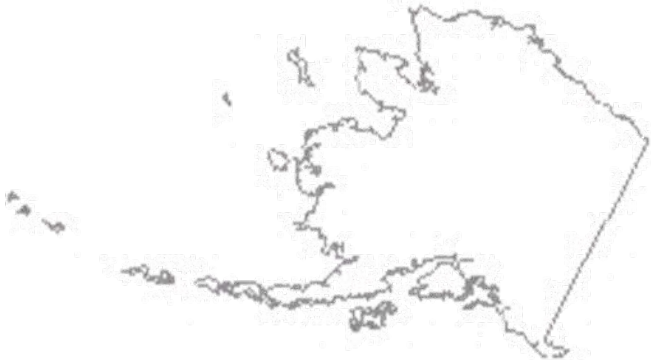
WWW.GP.ORG



Platform 2004

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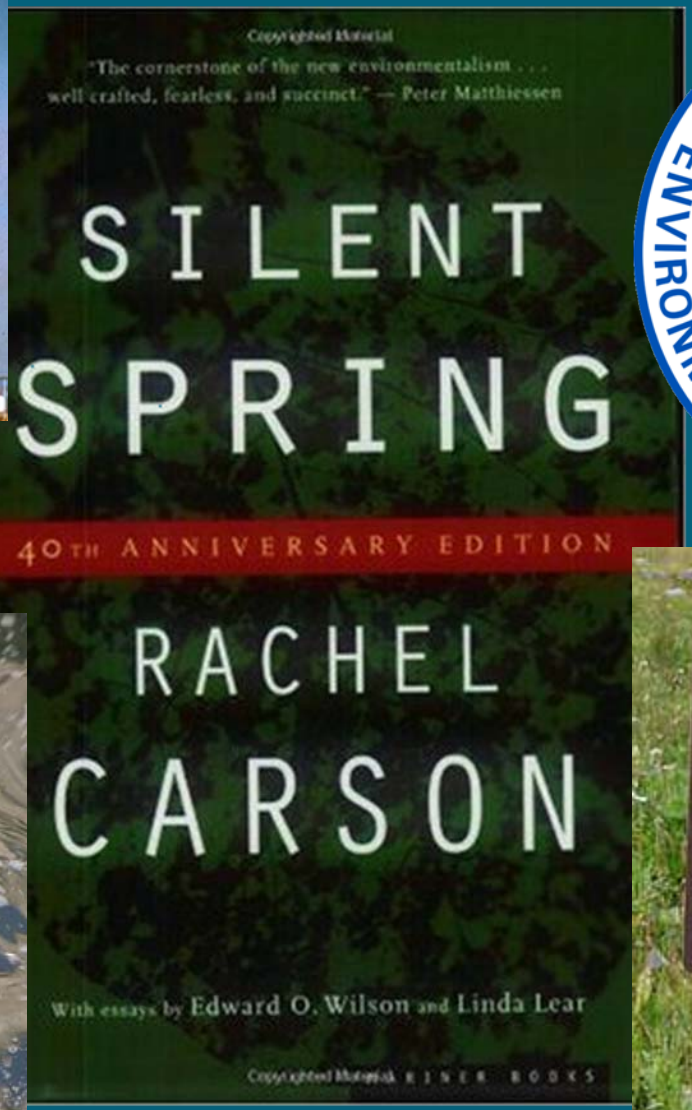
- No where in the platform are any of the above instances of green defined in any way


"The cornerstone of the new environmentalism . . . well crafted, fearless, and succinct." — Peter Matthiessen
SILENT SPRING
40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
RACHEL CARSON
With essays by Edward O. Wilson and Linda Lear

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WILDERNESS
CLOSED TO MOTOR VEHICLES AND MOTORIZED EQUIPMENT
Area back of this sign is managed and protected under Public Law (43U.S.C.1701 16U.S.C.1131-1136)
Violations Punishable

Have you made minor changes in your life to protect the environment?

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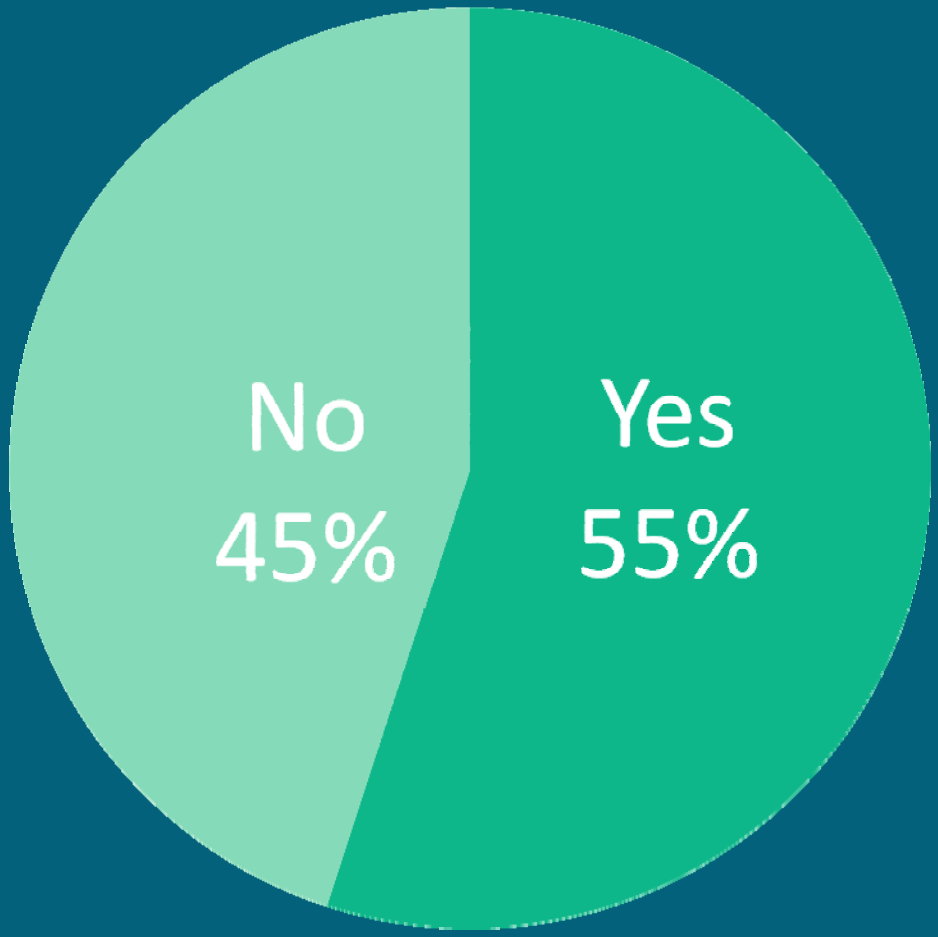

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- Overall environmental activism is down

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- Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) are a start but still do not work from a standardized set of vocabulary and context

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‘ecologically sustainable development’

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  - Many species of native plants or wildflowers as ‘weeds’

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- Most common linguistic device used to mislead about the environment

- Examples
  - ‘clear’ as in ‘clearing the forest’
  - ‘crop’ and ‘harvest’ and their use in forestry
  - ‘clean’ as in ‘clean coal’

- Trends in SAE (un)marking and the absent referent

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- Trend #2-Nominilization (unmarking)
  - Habitat loss
  - Rainforest destruction
  - Natural vs. human induced erosion
  - Places and processes of natural greenhouse gas emissions vs. anthropogenic sources of emissions

American politics

Democracy in America

Language and opinion

Framing climate change

Mar 1st 2011, 22:15 by W.W. | IOWA CITY

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OUR readers are evidently fascinated by American attitudes toward global warming and/or climate change. I say "and/or" because it turns out that opinion on the subject is sensitive to the language one uses to refer to the putative meteorological phenomenon. A new paper (ungated) in the scholarly journal *Public Opinion Quarterly* by Jonathon P. Schuldt, Sara H. Konrath, and Norbert Schwarz examined the websites of conservative and liberal think tanks and found that conservatives are more likely to speak of "global warming" whilst liberals are inclined to speak instead of "climate change". The elite conservative usage seems to be a cause or effect (probably both) of conservative public opinion.

> *Republicans were less likely to endorse that the phenomenon is real when it was referred to as "global warming" (44.0%) rather than "climate change" (60.2%), whereas Democrats were unaffected by question wording (86.9% vs. 86.4%). As a result, the partisan divide on the issue dropped from 42.9 percentage points under a "global warming" frame to 26.2 percentage*

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- In SAE green mixed connotations; jealousy, envy and sickness are viewed negatively while money, prosperity, and growth are viewed positively

“Language is a powerful force that shapes people’s and society's opinions, attitudes and ultimately behavior”

Moving forward

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- Change the way we talk about the environment, work towards being more specific

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- Change the way we talk about the environment, work towards being more specific
- Demand more transparency and accountability

QUESTIONS?

dees@ksu.edu

References

- World map: http://culturedecoded.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/the-truth-about-our-media/
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- EPA logo: http://www.celsias.com/article/epa-greenhouse-gases-threaten-public-health-and-en/
- Air pollution photo: http://www.usclimatenetwork.org/news-room/feature-articles