

# The Study of EDA in China during 2013–2024: Current Status, Development, and Prospects

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## Abstract

Ecological discourse analysis (EDA), an interdisciplinary field within the ecological framework, aims to uncover the role of language in shaping ecosystems. It explores the construction of the human—ecosystem relationship through language and examines the emergence and propagation of speciesism and anthropocentrism. This study comprehensively reviews and deeply analyzes China’s EDA research from 2013 to 2024. Relying mainly on the CNKI database and using the CiteSpace analysis method, it examines multiple aspects, including research trends, corpus types, research perspectives, and authors’ contributions. China’s EDA research has shown a steady growth trend. Scholars have applied it in various fields such as literature, tourism, and news media, using diverse corpora like translations of classical Chinese poetry, English poems, and news reports. Research approaches like harmonious discourse analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) have been widely employed. Nevertheless, several challenges remain. There is a shortage of quantitative research, insufficient exploration of discourse dissemination among social groups, and a delay in emerging media—related studies. For future research, it is essential to prioritize quantitative methods, focus on social—group differences, keep up with emerging media trends, strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, integrate global and local perspectives, and monitor the dynamic changes in ecological discourse. This not only enhances China’s academic influence in this field but also promotes ecological protection by raising public awareness of the complex language—ecosystem relationship. Moreover, it can facilitate cultural exchange and understanding by comparing and integrating ecological discourses globally, enriching cultural diversity. In education, such research can offer valuable insights for curriculum design, helping students better understand ecological issues and fostering environmental responsibility from a linguistic perspective.

**Keywords:** EDA, SFL, ecolinguistics, CiteSpace analysis

## 1. Introduction

As an emerging interdisciplinary field, ecolinguistics bridges linguistics, ecology, and environmental studies, focusing on the interplay between language and the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms, and the physical environment (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Its primary goal is to sustain these relationships. Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA), part of the “ecological turn” in the humanities and social sciences, examines the interaction between language and the environment, aiming to enhance ecological awareness.

The study of ecolinguistics began earlier abroad, with EDA research being relatively mature (Stibbe, 2015). Its origins trace back to the 1970s, when the ecological shift in the humanities and social sciences spurred its development. In 1972, Haugen introduced the concept of language ecology, and in 1990, Halliday redefined the relationship between ecology and language. Their theories form the core paradigms of ecolinguistics: “Haugen’s model” and “Halliday’s model.” EDA research has two main trends: one examines the influence of the environment on language, initiated by Haugen’s “Language Ecology” or “The Ecology of Language” (1972), and the other explores the impact of language on the environment, marked by Halliday’s work (1990), known as “ecolinguistics” or the “Hallidayan approach” (Fill, 2001). For terminological consistency, “ecolinguistics” will be used throughout this paper. Halliday’s “Green Grammar” provides a theoretical foundation for EDA, integrating systemic functional linguistics (SFL) concepts such as metafunctions, grammatical metaphor, and context to construct a framework for discourse analysis at both linguistic and contextual levels (Miao & Lei,

2019). Alexander and Stibbe (2014) clearly defined the concepts of “analysis of ecological discourse” and “ecological analysis of discourse”, providing an important theoretical framework and research direction for discourse analysis within the field of ecolinguistics. Specifically, the “analysis of ecological discourse” primarily focuses on texts that directly address ecological issues (such as environmental policies, climate change reports, etc.), aiming to reveal how these discourses construct the relationship between humans and nature and their potential impact on environmental protection. On the other hand, the “ecological analysis of discourse” expands the scope of research to include all types of discourse (such as advertisements, economic reports, everyday conversations, etc.), delving into how these discourses implicitly shape human attitudes and behaviors toward nature, as well as their potential ecological implications.

Today, ecological problems have become a global challenge, and China has demonstrated its unique eco-civilization. The concept of “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping profoundly reveals the intrinsic unity of economic development and ecological protection, and provides important ideological guidance for ecological governance in China and the world. In this context, EDA research combines with multiple disciplines and seeks to reveal the nature of ecological problems from the perspective of linguistics, which is of pivotal significance to eco-civilisation in China. To a certain extent, the development of EDA in China draws on foreign research foundations, but its core objective is to be based on Chinese reality and serve the needs of China’s eco-civilisation construction. The unique value of EDA in China is also reflected in its role in spreading the ecological philosophy of Chinese characteristics. The philosophical foundation of EDA has a distinctive localised character, as the ecological philosophical concepts upheld by researchers directly affect the value judgement and discourse interpretation of EDA (Huang, 2018). Therefore, in China, the development of EDA must reflect traditional Chinese ecological philosophy and values. It is necessary to discover the “harmony between the heaven and human” thought in traditional Chinese culture through EDA research, to modernise this traditional ecological value, and then to demonstrate China’s unique ecological wisdom to the world. On the international stage, through analysing successful cases of ecological protection in China, EDA conveys to the world China’s concept of harmonious ecology and green development, and highlights the beautiful image of “Green China”. The shaping of this ecological image not only helps to enhance China’s international influence, but also contributes Chinese wisdom to global ecological governance.

In China, research on EDA has advanced significantly by synthesizing international scholarly contributions with localized adaptations tailored to the country’s unique socio-cultural context. Scholars have innovatively extended the application of EDA across diverse disciplines, integrating it with China’s distinctive cultural heritage and societal realities. For example, in the field of literary studies, researchers have conducted rigorous EDA of literary texts, examining ecological themes through the lens of traditional Chinese cultural values and literary theories. Similarly, in tourism studies, scholars have investigated the ecological and cultural dimensions embedded within tourism discourse, offering insights that support the sustainable development of the industry. By contextualizing foreign theoretical frameworks within China’s cultural and research paradigms, Chinese scholars have cultivated a unique methodological approach to EDA.

To systematically evaluate the current landscape of EDA research in China, this study utilizes CiteSpace to visualize research trends, corpus typologies, analytical perspectives, and author contributions from 2013 to 2024. This analytical framework aims to elucidate the developmental trajectory, identify emerging research hotspots, and map interdisciplinary linkages within the field of EDA in China. The findings are expected to provide a robust foundation for future scholarly inquiries. By advancing EDA research within the Chinese context, this study aspires to contribute culturally nuanced perspectives to the global discourse on ecolinguistics, thereby enhancing China’s academic influence and fostering cross-cultural dialogue in this evolving field.

## 2. Research Methodology

This study focuses on domestic EDA research from 2013 to 2024. For reference selection, the primary source is CNKI, China’s largest academic database, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant literature. To achieve a thorough and in-depth analysis, the study integrates CNKI’s built-in literature analysis tools with CiteSpace. This dual-method approach enables a multidimensional examination of the current state of EDA research in China, specifically addressing four key perspectives:

(1) Author Contributions and Academic Networks: By systematically analyzing the research outputs of various authors, this study identifies their contributions, research directions, and potential academic collaborations. This analysis reveals the distribution of academic influence within China’s EDA research community and highlights the roles of different author groups in advancing the field.

(2) Industry Journals and Graduate Theses: Industry journals serve as a barometer for cutting-edge

developments and research trends in EDA. By examining articles published in these journals, the study captures the evolving focus and priorities of EDA research over time. Additionally, master's and doctoral theses, representing the emerging generation of scholars, provide insights into young researchers' interpretations of EDA, their methodological innovations, and their applications of theoretical frameworks.

(3) **Diverse Material Types:** EDA encompasses a wide range of materials, including text, images, audio, and more. Analyzing these diverse media types offers a holistic understanding of how ecological discourse is expressed and disseminated across different platforms. This approach enriches EDA research by introducing varied perspectives and methodologies.

(4) **Functional Perspectives:** EDA can be approached from multiple functional angles, such as semantic, pragmatic, and social perspectives. By comparing these viewpoints, the study clarifies the significance and roles of ecological discourse at different levels and explores the interconnections between them. This comparative analysis contributes to the development of a more robust theoretical framework for EDA.

Through this comprehensive and multidimensional analysis, the study aims to provide a detailed overview of China's EDA research landscape, identify emerging trends, and offer valuable insights for future scholarly endeavors in this field.

### 3. Analysis of Domestic Ecological Discourse in China

#### 3.1 General Trends and Characteristics

In order to understand the development and research results of Ecolinguistics in China in the past 10 years, authors searched all the journals in CNKI with the search term of "EDA", and the distribution curve is as follows.

According to the data source of this paper (CNKI search of Chinese domestic literature on EDA research), the first research on "EDA" appeared in 2013, namely Systemic Functional Linguistics and Ecological Discourse Analysis (Xin & Huang, 2013). This study is systematic, authoritative, and highly cited, and provides a basic theory to follow for the development of EDA in China. In addition, please see Figure 1, which shows that EDA research gradually shows an upward incremental trend from 2013. Therefore 2013 is chosen as the time point.

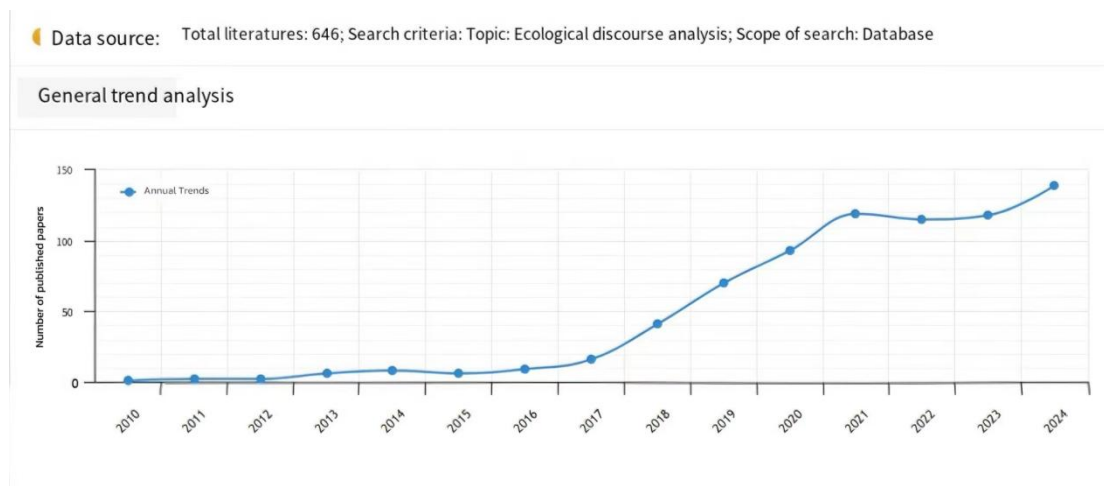


Figure 1. The annual line chart of EDA published on CNKI in the past ten years

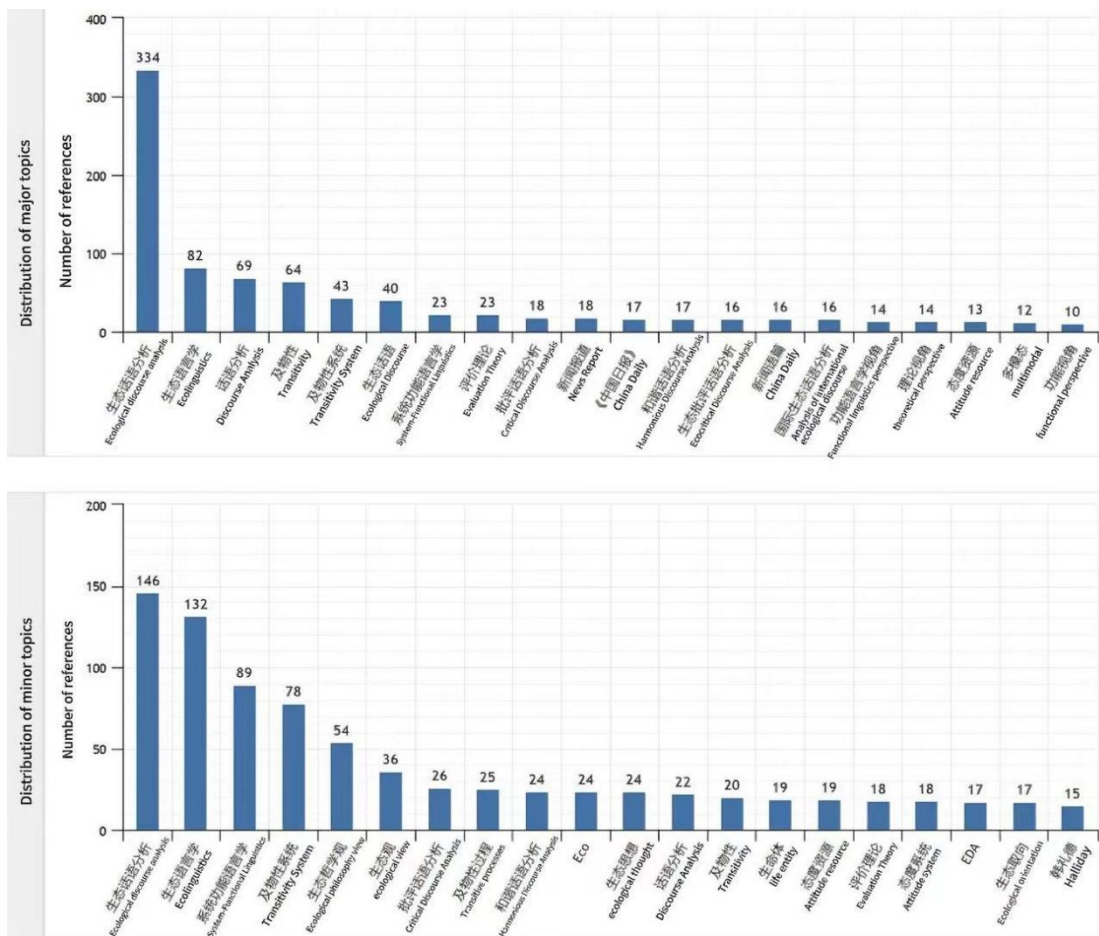


Figure 2. Distribution of major and minor topics

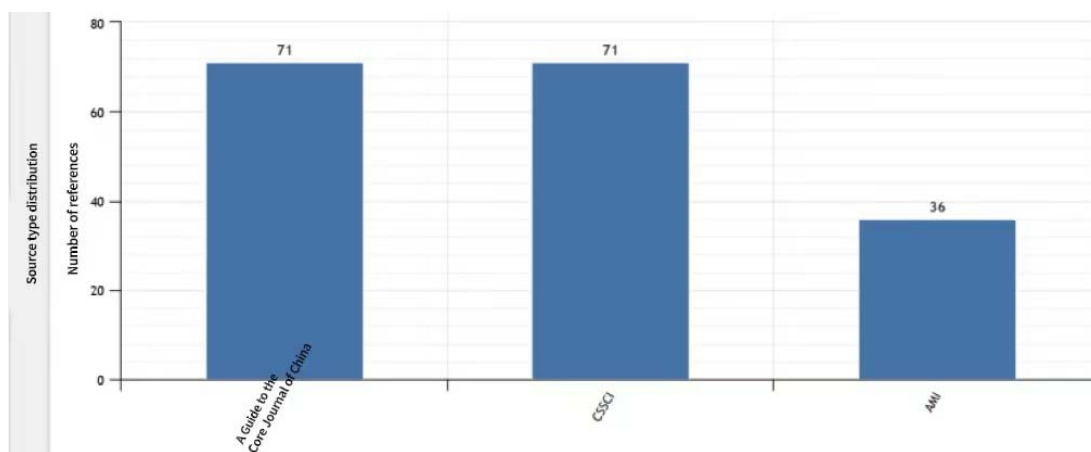


Figure 3. Source type distribution

As shown in the figures, the domestic research on EDA is generally on the rise, and the research on EDA has developed significantly since 2017, and what is more noteworthy is that the research in 2020–2021 has the fastest growth, and there is a better development momentum after 2021. The curve in the figure shows that the total number of articles on EDA has gradually risen, which can be seen that the study of Ecological linguistics has been paid attention to by more and more domestic scholars. In terms of theme distribution, EDA occupies a major position, meanwhile, discourse analysis, Ecological linguistics, materiality, SFL and other themes also have a larger proportion. In terms of publication channels, AMI, Peking University Core, and CSSCI authoritative literature

account for a larger proportion.

### 3.2 Analysis of Corpus Types

China's domestic research on EDA started late, and the early studies were scattered and widely involved in a variety of fields such as literary criticism, tourism, news media, etc., mostly using discourse analysis as a means to study ecological resources.

For example, Yuan and Yan (2010) apply discourse analysis theory to the construction of tourism culture; Zheng and Gong (2011) analyze the domestic news media's coverage of the March 11 earthquake in Japan from the perspective of discourse construction; there are also eco-discourse analyses of literature, such as studies of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (Li, 2011); Dai and Qiu (2012) analyzed the English synopsis of Eco-Hotel; Huang and Xin (2013) published a related study pointing out that eco-discourse analysis is not a branch of critical discourse and explained the relevant understanding of SFL. Since Huang (2018) introduced Ecolinguistics and the theory system related to EDA comprehensively into China, EDA has become an important topic in the field of foreign language research, and the number of related studies has been increasing, including literature reviews on the current state of research.

Based on corpus types, this part summarizes the journal articles on domestic EDA in the past five years included in the CNKI.

#### 3.2.1 Literature as Corpus

The studies by Chen (2019), Li and Wang (2022), and Chen and Dong (2023) collectively contribute to the understanding of ecological themes through the lens of EDA. Each study employs SFL and materiality perspectives to explore the ecological implications of poetry and its translations. Together, these studies emphasize the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness and demonstrate the potential of EDA to reveal deeper ecological philosophies embedded in literary texts.

Studies (Huang & Chen, 2017; Liu & Wang, 2019; Niu & Zhang, 2020) share a common focus on employing EDA to explore the ecological themes and philosophical underpinnings in English natural poetry. Each study delves into the linguistic features that convey the poets' ecological perspectives, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans and nature. They collectively advocate for a deeper understanding of ecological values through poetic analysis and highlight the role of language in promoting environmental awareness and responsibility.

It is more common to see studies with novel as corpora, and this kind of research mostly chooses natural literature as the analytical text, analyzing the discourse related to ecology in the novels from a linguistic point of view, providing inspiration for the construction of ecological civilization nowadays with the ecological philosophical thoughts in the novels. Several studies have analyzed the ecological discourse of Chi Zijian's *The Right Bank of the Ergun River* by applying and materiality system theory (Zhang, 2023; Li, 2023), which demonstrates the ecologically beneficial discourse through the relationship between human and nature, and conveys the idea of the symbiosis of equality between human beings and the natural ecology. Other scholars have conducted an eco-discourse analysis of Jin Yong's martial arts novel *The Legend of the Eagle-Shooting Heroes* by applying the theory of SFL from the non-metaphorical model of Ecolinguistics, and have excavated the linguistic ecological features hidden in the martial arts novel (He, 2024).

However, the studies tend to focus on individual natural poems, they often lack practical recommendations for how these insights can be applied in other kinds of poems to foster greater environmental consciousness.

#### 3.2.2 Media Discourse as Corpus

The studies reviewed here collectively advance the field of EDA by employing a consistent methodology to examine ecological narratives across diverse texts and contexts. Each study utilizes a multilevel analytical approach, focusing on linguistic features such as discourse domains, semantics, and syntactic structures to uncover underlying ecological ideologies and human-nature relationships.

Taking BBC's nature documentary *Perfect Planet* aired on Bilibili platform as a research object, and materiality theory as a theoretical foundation, Xia (2022) analyzes documentary's linguistic features to reveal its ecological ideas, and manually annotated six materialities in commentaries using UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 software, revealing the ecological concept of harmonious coexistence between human and nature conveyed by the nature documentary from the perspective of language. Zhao (2016) challenges species prejudice through the analysis of the silver hake's identity, while Sun and Guo (2022) highlight global ecological consciousness in news reports about the Amazon rainforest fires. Cao (2022) explores the potential of online eco-discourse to shape public

eco-values, and Miao (2023) constructs an EDA framework that emphasizes the interdependence and symbiosis among humans, other life forms, and the environment.

Government work reports are also popular in EDA. The aim is to reveal the deeper discursive meanings conveyed by the text and to analyse how these meanings have shaped China's ecological image in the international arena. In analysis of the 20th Party Congress Report, Fan (2024) selects the diplomatic discourse as chosen corpus, serving to illustrate China's diplomatic philosophy of advocating peaceful coexistence of all countries in the world, as well as revealing the ecological philosophical view embedded in the diplomatic discourse. Ren and Cheng (2024) employ the English translation of the white paper "China's Biodiversity Conservation" as their research text. They sought to construct an image of China's ecological position from a material perspective, investigating the pivotal roles played by various factors, with a view to elucidating the discursive significance conveyed in the text. The study then proceeds to analyse the aforementioned discursive significance.

Speeches in EDA reveal that the EDA research of the evaluation system should be paid attention to. Some studies take Trump's speech withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement as the research corpus, visualizing and analyzing the dialogical spatial regulation in Trump's speech in both temporal and spatial dimensions. Both are too concerned about local ecology, and that the human factor in the evaluation process should be grasped comprehensively from the philosophical level (Li & Liu, 2020).

### 3.2.3 Slogans as Corpus

Studies related to the use of slogans as a corpus for EDA are relatively rare. This study (Kuang et al., 2022) chooses Chinese wildlife protection slogans as the corpus of EDA, analyzing the characteristics of the transitive process of Chinese wildlife protection slogans, and demonstrated that Chinese wildlife protection slogans realize their social functions through the transitive process so as to convey ecological consciousness and ecological concepts. In the future we can pay more attention to the interpretation of ecological meanings in slogans.

### 3.2.4 Teaching Materials as Corpus

Most of the studies of this type are selected from the textbooks used by Chinese domestic students for learning, for example, several scholars have selected the textbooks published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press for their discourses (Wei, 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Liu, 2021), while some scholars have used the textbooks for moral education in elementary school (Zeng & Hong, 2021) or the textbooks under the exam-based education of junior high school and senior high school (Wang & Shi, 2022; Li & Ding, 2024) as analysis materials. A few scholars compare domestic students' learning textbooks with international students' learning textbooks (He & Tian, 2024). This type of paper applies the three major metafunctional theories of SFL to analyze the contents of textbooks in terms of eco-discourse, which helps to strengthen the education of eco-civilization in teaching, and actively guides the students to set up the value of the harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature.

### 3.2.5 Comics as Corpus

In a recent study, guided by ecological philosophy, Zhao (2022) focus on multimodal metaphorical scenes, examining bioenergy political cartoons, which underscores the necessity for a comprehensive examination and critical reflection on the development of the comics and its ecological impacts.

### 3.2.6 Theoretical Meaning

Rather than providing exhaustive descriptions of diverse datasets, these studies concentrate on the most relevant corpora to highlight the theoretical contributions of EDA. They demonstrate how linguistic analysis can uncover deeper ecological philosophies embedded in many fields, offering insights into the interplay between language, ecology, and cultural contexts. This theoretical provides a framework for analyzing ecological themes in other literary and cultural texts. However, all of these studies above suffer from an overly monolithic application of theory and an apparent lack of research focusing on dynamics.

## 3.3 Classification of Different Research Perspectives

### 3.3.1 Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA)

The studies reviewed here demonstrate the versatility of Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) in examining ecological themes across various texts and contexts. They consistently employ SFL to highlight the unity of humans and nature, emphasizing how language shapes ecological perspectives. These studies provide valuable frameworks for analyzing harmonious discourse and materiality, contributing to a deeper understanding of environmental narratives and their implications. However, they also share limitations, such as a reliance on a

single theoretical framework and a focus on specific texts, which may limit broader applicability. Additionally, while they offer insights into ecological discourse, practical applications in environmental policy and communication remain underexplored. Future research could benefit from integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and expanding the scope of analysis to enhance the practical impact of HDA in addressing environmental challenges (Zeng, 2022; Yang, 2022; Chen, 2024; Liu, 2024; Zhao, 2022).

### 3.3.2 SFL

SFL views language as a resource used to express meaning, and its theory provides a theoretical perspective and an operational analytical framework for EDA.

Based on SFL and EDA methods, some studies demonstrate China's actions and planning in the field of ecological governance from three aspects: empirical meaning system, interpersonal meaning system, and discourse meaning system, reflecting China's high level of commitment to and value judgment of environmental protection issues. Through the establishment of the corpus and the application of annotation software, the ecological discourse in Xi Jinping's diplomatic discourse is systematically data analyzed, reflecting China's ecological practice experience, conveying to the international community positive significance of ecological protection, shaping a positive ecological image of responsibility, contributing Chinese wisdom to global environmental governance (Xu & Gao, 2021; Liu & Miao, 2024; Yu, 2023). The studies reviewed here collectively demonstrate the power of linguistic analysis in uncovering ecological perspectives and ideologies within various texts and discourses. Li (2024) employs a green grammar-based EDA framework to analyze the roles of human and natural participants, highlighting how language shapes our understanding of ecological relationships and anthropocentric ideologies. He and Shen (2023) delve into elementary language textbooks, revealing a human-centered ecological view and emphasizing the responsibility of humans within ecosystems. Ren and Gao (2024) analyze "dual-carbon" reports, proposing an ecological concept that promotes global climate action. Cao and Li (2023) examine news reports on the Yellow River, uncovering the ideological underpinnings and ecological consciousness. Shao and Peng (2021) explore consumer evaluations during the pandemic, highlighting cultural differences in ecological and health concerns. These studies enrich our understanding of how language constructs ecological narratives and ideologies, influencing both individual and collective actions.

### 3.3.3 Statistic Analysis Methods

At present, there is a greater number of qualitative studies in the field of EDA. These studies are discussed in depth in the preceding section. Despite the current dearth of quantitative studies, we have identified a number of relevant texts for discussion.

#### 1) EDA path construction

Zhang and Xiao (2024) explore the effects of ecological discourse (ED) on individuals' ecological behavior (EB) in environmental protection from the perspective of the eco-linguistic continuum. Therefore, as a new indicator, ED not only provides a new perspective for environmental protection and sustainable development, but also explores its potential application value. In related studies, ED functions as a theoretical framework that guides the construction of the Multidimensional Synergistic Sustainability Model (MASM) and is used to analyze and explain the use and development of markers in the first and second languages and how they align and interact with the environment, thus providing a more holistic perspective to understand and promote language sustainability (Xiao et al., 2023).

#### 2) Ecological literacy

Starting from the perspective of linguistic ecology, the study (Ha et al., 2021) first clarifies the concept of ecological literacy, which is divided into five parts. Using residents of Guiyang City, China, as a case study to investigate how they interact with the ecological environment through language and behavior, the study assesses and analyzes ecological literacy. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire with specific questions was designed to collect respondents' answers through an online survey which analyzed by statistical software SPSS. Ultimately, by analyzing the correlation between different ecological literacy dimensions. Similarly, the study (Ha et al., 2023) used Guiyang City, China, as an example to explore the feasibility of lifestyle interventions to improve citizens' ecological literacy, quantitatively assessed ecological literacy from a linguistic ecological perspective in the form of a questionnaire, and constructed a model of potential mechanisms of ecological literacy based on the results of previous studies. The findings suggest that the formation and development of ecological literacy is a dynamic and cyclical process that requires the coordination of five variables. Through the interaction of these factors, an ecosystem in which humans and nature coexist harmoniously can be constructed. Taking "ecological

civilization” education as an example, Zhang (2022) explores an effective model for embedding ideological and political education in the curriculum of foreign language majors in Chinese colleges and universities. Based on the concepts of ecological interaction context and linguistic ecological continuum, the study investigates the impact of explicit and implicit treatments of core values education among foreign language majors, which provides a basis for relevant policy formulation and theoretical research in universities.

3) Scenic perspective

Zhang et al. (2022) introduced the landscape ecology, integrating the principles of landsenses ecology with the traditional Chinese ecological wisdom of harmonizing heaven, earth, and humanity. The researcher also demonstrated the intervention function of anti-fur language in subjects’ psychology and behavior by using McNemar’s test, thus proving the social effect of language in the creation of scenic sense creation (Zhang et al., 2021a). Zhang et al. (2021b) explored the psychological perception mechanisms within landsenses ecology. Through questionnaires and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), they analyzed how publicity texts on low-carbon lifestyles affect individuals’ psychological perceptions, comparing the efficacy of different texts. These findings provide practical insights into how to promote sustainable behaviors through discourse creation.

3.4 Discussion on Authorship

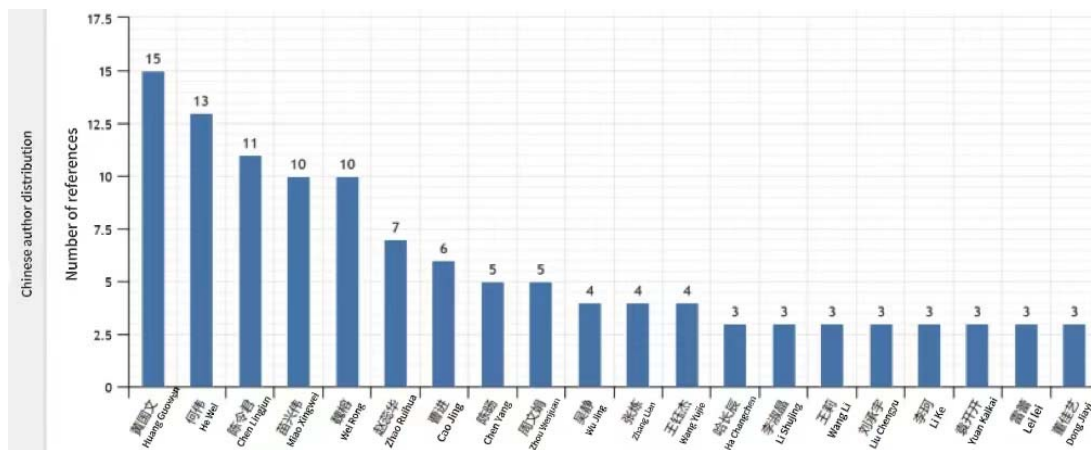


Figure 4. Chinese author distribution

Based on the search, this paper has come up with the authors who are currently more active in the analysis of ecological discourse in China. We will select a few of the most representative authors and analyze the comparison of the same author’s research objects, direction shifts and the connection of different authors (multiple co-authors) on the topic’s research.

**Top 3 Authors with the Strongest Citation Bursts**

Authors	Year	Strength	Begin	End	2013 - 2024
Huang Guowen	2013	3.89	2016	2018	
He Wei	2017	3.82	2017	2018	
Chen Lingjun	2019	2.85	2019	2020	

Figure 5. Top 3 most associated authors from Cite Space analysis



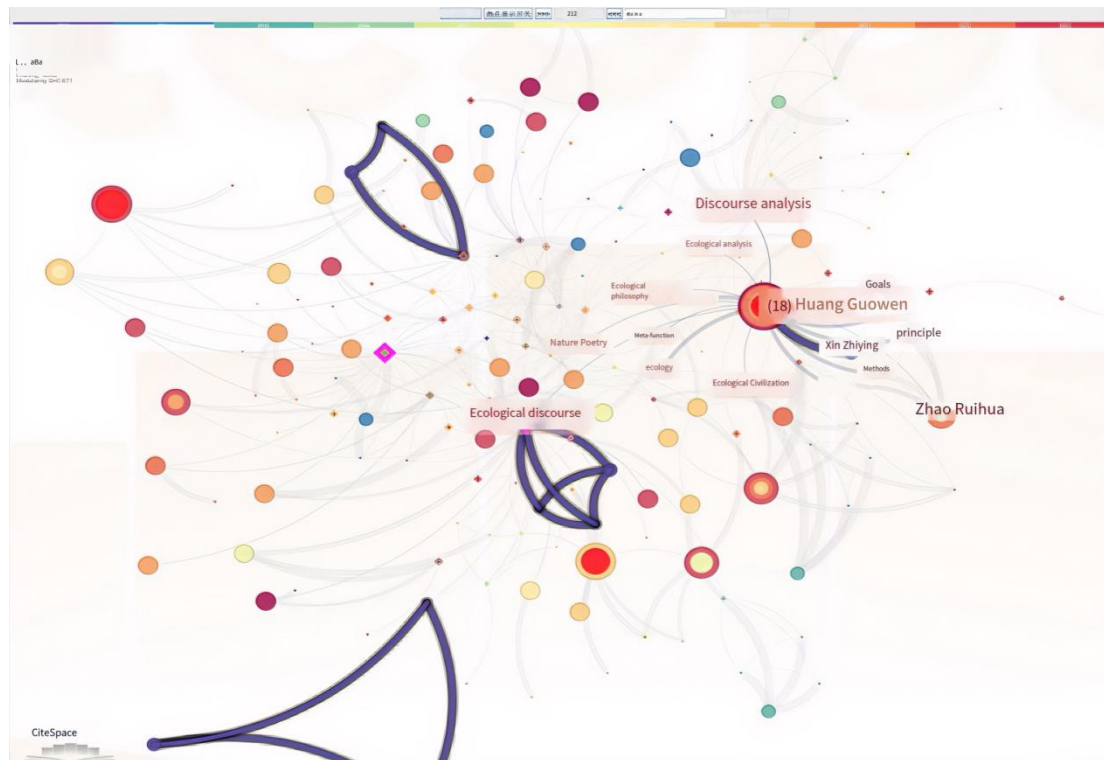


Figure 6. The research focuses related to Huang

Huang Guowen is a leading figure in China's Ecolinguistics research, whose research interests mainly involve functional linguistics, Ecolinguistics, discourse analysis and translation studies.

Huang's eco-linguistic research has gone through the process of basic understanding of the relationship between language and ecological environment, to in-depth discussion of the theory and practice of EDA. The research focuses related to Huang can be seen in Figure 6. In the Chinese context, Huang particularly emphasized the importance of harmonious discourse analysis. He pointed out that harmonious discourse analysis is not simply to criticize non-ecological factors, but to study the adjustment and integration of ecological and non-ecological factors, and to promote harmony among the various participants in the ecosystem (Huang & Zhao, 2017).

Huang's study also emphasizes the localization of eco-linguistic research, arguing that Western eco-philosophy or eco-views are not entirely suitable for assessing ecological problems in China. He advocates the integration of traditional Chinese culture, such as the Taoist idea of the unity of heaven and man and the Confucian concept of benevolence and love of people, into eco-linguistic research to promote ecological harmony.

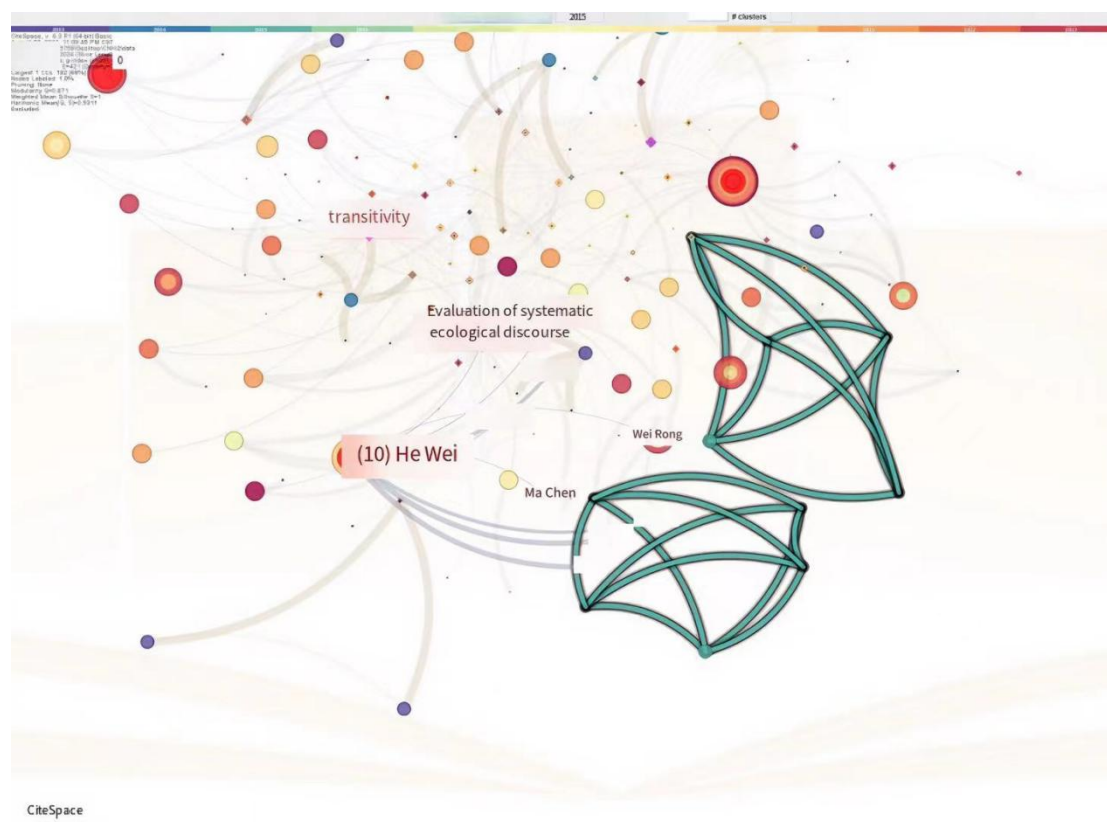


Figure 7. The research focuses related to He

He Wei is a professor and doctoral supervisor at the Research Center for Chinese Foreign Languages and Education and the National Research Center for Language Competence Development at Beijing Foreign Studies University, as well as the president of the Ecolinguistics Committee of the Chinese Society for Comparative English-Chinese Studies. Her research interests include SFL, English-Chinese comparison, Ecolinguistics, discourse analysis and translation studies.

He's research direction on EDA has undergone a remarkable evolution. In 2021, the book *Research on the New Development of Ecological Discourse Analysis*, in which she and others participated, studied language and ecological issues from the perspective of SFL, highlighting the meta-functional analysis method to reveal the values hidden in the discourse. This book aims to reveal the impact of language on the natural and social environment through EDA, to raise people's ecological awareness, to improve ecological behaviors, to promote the benign development of the ecosystem, and to achieve the harmonious coexistence of human and nature, human and society, and human and oneself.

He's contributions to the field of Ecolinguistics also include an introduction to the development of Ecolinguistics, including the concept of "linguistic ecology" first proposed by Haugen in 1970, and the two major modes of analysis in Ecolinguistics—the Haugen model and the Halliday's model. Haugen's model and Halliday's model (He & Wei, 2018). In recent years, He and her team have further developed Halliday's approach, defining EDA as an independent paradigm (He, 2021). They propose an EDA framework based on ecological philosophy, aiming to reveal the impact of language use on the environment, in order to raise people's ecological awareness, improve ecological behaviors, and promote the harmonious development of ecosystems. In their book *Research On the New Developments of Ecological Discourse Analysis*, they proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework for EDA, covering empirical metafunctions, interpersonal metafunctions, textual metafunctions, and logical metafunctions, and constructed the transposition system, tone system, evaluation system, thematic system, coherence system and logical system (Cheng, 2022).

He points out that since the 21st century, Ecolinguistics has made remarkable development in terms of research scope, methodology and essential attributes of the discipline, and has introduced the concept of EDA model, which is developed from Halliday's model, emphasizing the relationship between ecological consciousness and eco-philosophical outlook as the basis for judging the ecological orientation of discourse. From Figure 7, it can

be seen that He has devoted more attention to the two aspects of EDA and evaluation system.

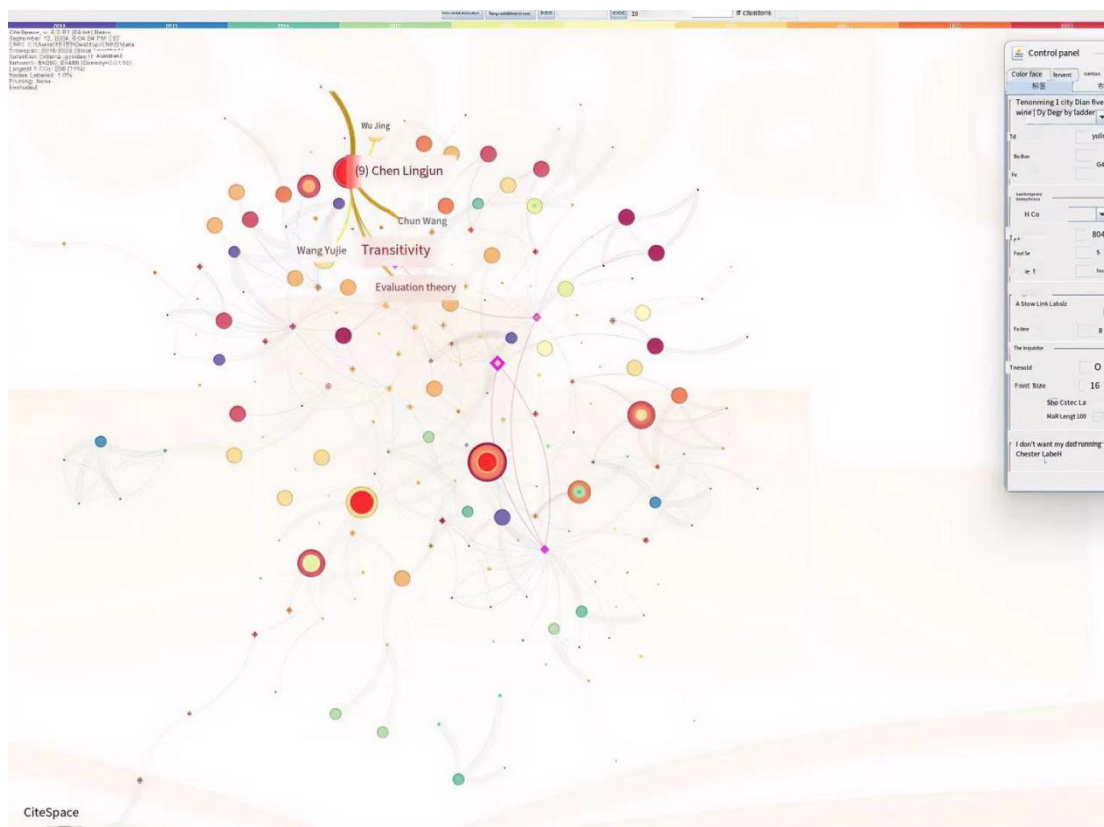


Figure 8. The research focuses related to Chen

Chen Lingjun's research mainly focuses on transitivity and evaluation theory. Starting from the perspective of SFL and transitivity, or from the perspective of evaluation theory attitude system, Chen and her co-authors compare and analyze the ecological meanings of ancient Chinese poems and their English translations, so as to re-conceptualize the relationship between human beings and nature. In terms of the application fields of EDA, Chen Lingjun's research is not only limited to the theoretical construction, but also involves the application of EDA model in many fields, such as Internet language, foreign words, language landscape, emergency language, as well as language in literature, cultural works and textbooks, etc. In particular, she has studied the EDA of textbooks. In particular, in terms of eco-discourse analysis of textbooks, Chen proposes the study of animal discourse representation in textbooks from the perspective of Ecolinguistics, which helps to find new discourse modes to represent animals and to maintain the sustainable relationship of life between humans and animals, and which is an important revelation in the preparation and use of textbooks (Chen & Wang, 2020; Chen, 2019; Chen & Dong, 2023).

As major universities pay more and more attention to the quality of dissertations and put more and more efforts here, many doctoral or master's studies are also of reference significance. In this paper, the dissertations are divided into doctoral dissertations and master's dissertations, which are analyzed and summarized separately, aiming to understand the research on EDA by university students.

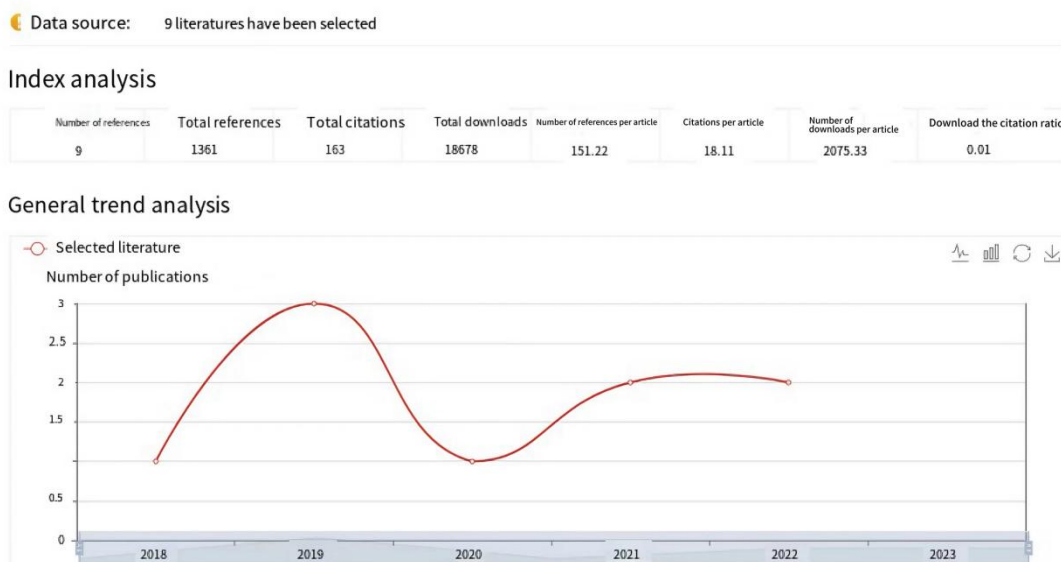


Figure 9. PhD dissertations in EDA published on CNKI

There are a total of 9 PhD dissertations in EDA, and the total number of citations and total downloads is relatively impressive. 2019 is the peak of publications, followed by a gradual stabilization of the number of publications. However, it can be seen that no new doctoral dissertation is published in this field after 2022, which indicates that the doctoral training in this area needs to be strengthened in universities.

In terms of issuing universities, University of Science and Technology Beijing (USTB), Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) and Southwest University (SWU) ranked the top in terms of the number of citations and downloads for their issued papers. The doctoral dissertations make new elaboration on EDA from different aspects.

Two doctoral dissertations from the University of Science and Technology Beijing start from SFL. Zhang researches on the construction of a discourse ecological analysis model from the perspective of SFL, contributing to determining the value orientation and judgment criteria of discourse ecology research (Zhang, 2018). Wei Rong's research tries to apply the linguistic ideas of hierarchization, metafunction and system of SFL, and integrate the international eco-philosophical concept of "pluralism, harmony and interactive symbiosis" based on traditional Chinese philosophy and culture and modern diplomatic concepts, revealing the destructive ecological consciousness, neutral ecological consciousness and beneficial ecological consciousness in the discourse, and then guiding people to cultivate a beneficial ecological consciousness (Wei, 2019).

Both papers from Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) have done comparative studies in several countries. Liu's study analyzes and compares the news discourse of "Belt and Road" in the mainstream media of five countries: China, the United States, Russia, New Zealand and Australia, reveals the ecological nature of the news discourse of the five countries, summarizes and analyzes the commonalities and personalities and their motivations, explores the insights of "Belt and Road" foreign communication in China's news media, and constructs a news discourse system suitable for publicity of "Belt and Road" (Liu, 2022). Taking Ecolinguistics as the research perspective and the eco-philosophical concept of "pluralism and harmony, interactive symbiosis" as the guiding principle, Gao's study explores eco-discourse in different countries' teaching materials by using the main texts of nature and ecology in the Chinese Ministry of Education Primary School *Chinese language and literature*, the American *Wonders*, *My Pals are Here! English* in Singapore, and *Marigold Honeysuckle* in India, to explore the ecological discourse in the textbooks of different countries providing insights for improving the discourse of elementary school language teaching materials in China (Gao, 2022).

Li Shujing from Southwest University takes environmental news discourse as an example to study the analysis of evaluation resources under the perspective of Ecolinguistics. The study takes evaluation theory as the linguistic foundation, combines the theories from ecological philosophy, psychology and other disciplines, providing the basis of judgment for the analysis of evaluation resources in ecological discourse (Li, 2019). Zhao's study explains the characteristics and functions of prison guards' discourse on educating and reforming offenders under the threshold of Ecolinguistics, which has certain theoretical significance and practical value.

The study innovates the path of educating and reforming offenders and provides the method of effectively educating and reforming offenders (Zhao, 2020).

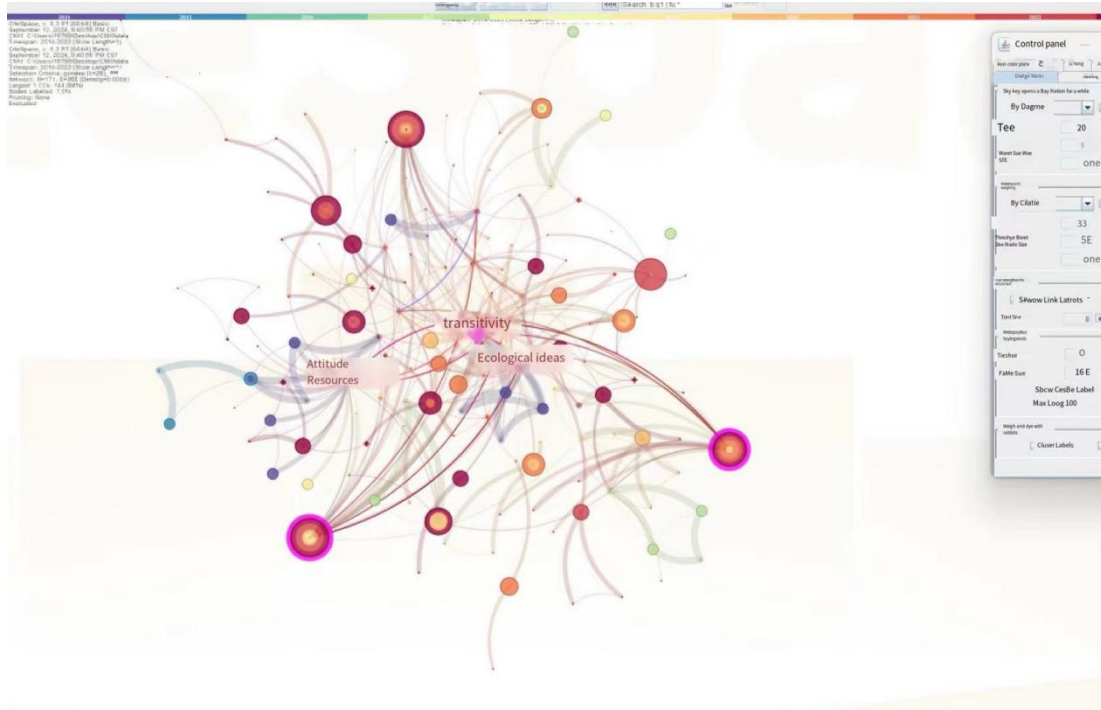


Figure 10. The research hotspots of master’s theses

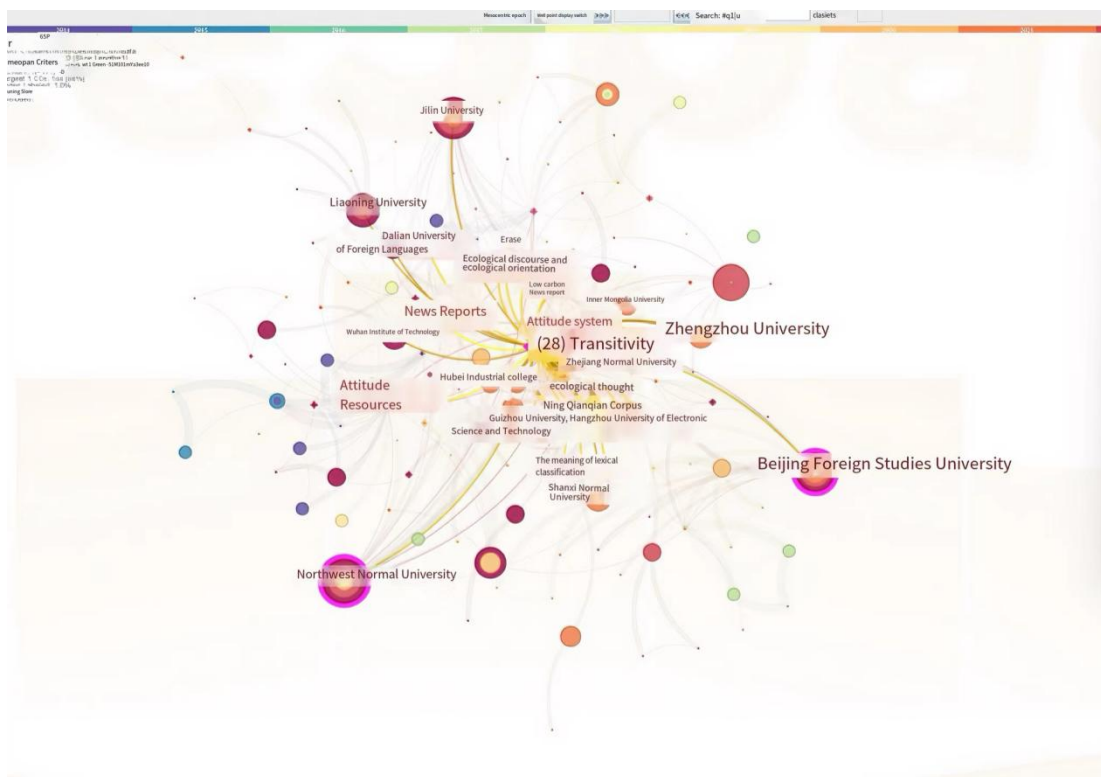


Figure 11. Highly active universities and their research hotspots



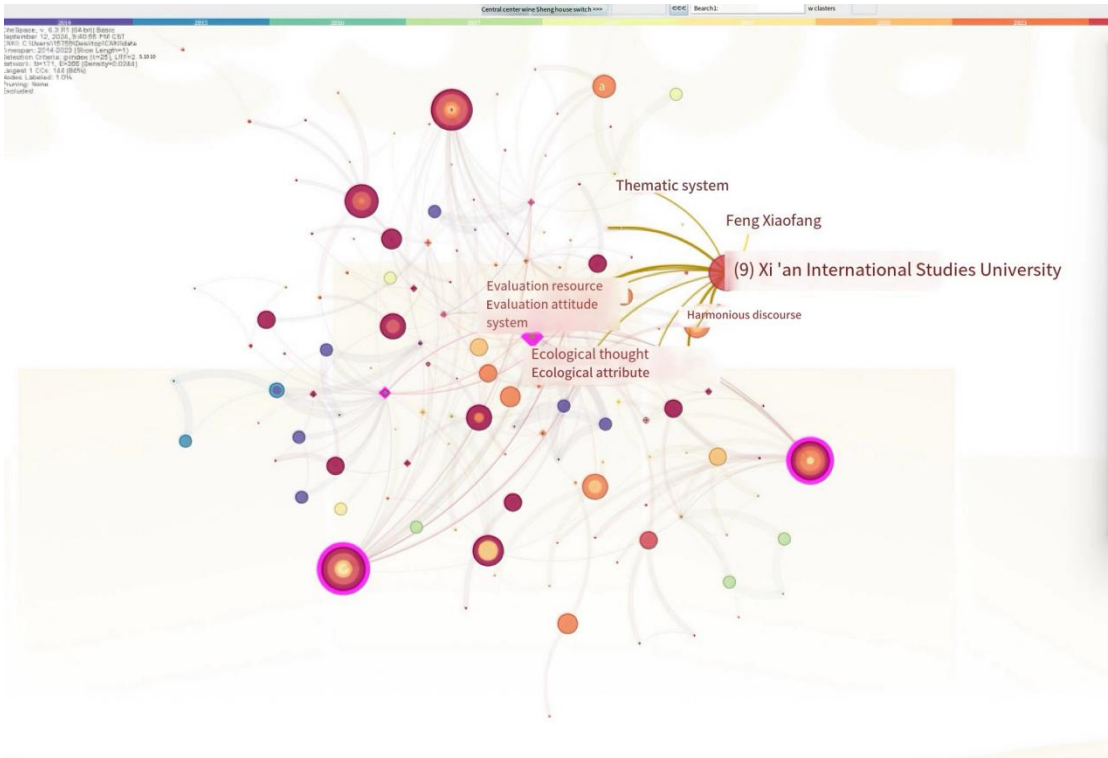


Figure 12. Xi'an International Studies University and its research hotspots

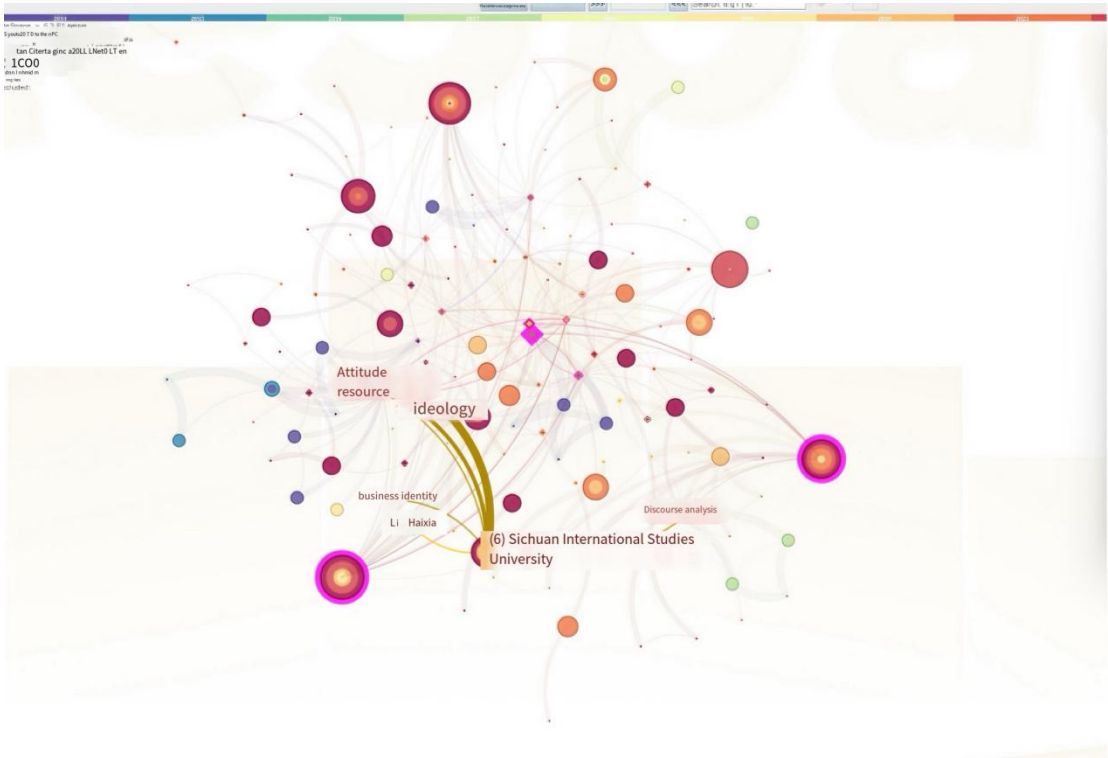


Figure 13. Sichuan International Studies University and its research hotspots

On the master's thesis, CiteSpace is used to do the analysis. The analysis results show that the research hotspots of master's theses focus on and transitivity, ecological thought and attitude resources. In terms of the issuing universities, it can be seen that Northwest Normal University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Jilin University, Liaoning University, Xi'an International Studies University, Sichuan Foreign Studies University, Guizhou University, Dalian Foreign Studies University, Zhengzhou University and Inner Mongolia University are more active. And transitivity, as an important concept in SFL, describes how language expresses experience, especially the relationship between the verb and the participants associated with the verb. The theory of transitivity also has a long history of development. In the 1960s, Michael Halliday, the founder of SFL, began to extend the object of study of transitivity from the verb to the whole small sentence, introducing the concept of the transitivity system. At this stage, the theory of transitivity began to take shape, and Halliday and other scholars such as Matthiessen, Martin and Fawcett made important contributions to the theory of transitivity. After that, the and transitivity theory was further developed to form a system of six process types including material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process. Nowadays, the theory of transitivity has been fully shaped into a semantic network system in this period, and has become a mature theoretical framework in SFL. The core of the transitivity system is its ability to categorize human experience into different "processes" and to identify the "participants" and "environmental components" associated with each process. These types of processes reflect real-world experiences, such as action, perception, emotion, cognition, and so on. The system of transitivity has not only been developed theoretically, but has also shown its value in practical applications, such as in the fields of literary translation and discourse analysis.

In cognitive linguistics, the system of transitivity has also been elaborated and applied, and it is closely related to the basic ideas of cognitive linguistics such as the experiential view, event schema and the theory of salience or attention. These studies have shown that the system of accessibility is not only a grammatical concept, but also a way of how human beings recognize and express the world through language. In the current master's thesis, and objectivity is used in a variety of ways, reflecting the innovative nature of the students.

#### **4. Research Deficiencies and Future Prospects**

Although certain advancements have been made in the research perspective of EDA in the field of Ecolinguistics in China, certain deficiencies still exist.

##### **1) Scarcity of quantitative research**

Currently, in the field of EDA, researchers mainly employ qualitative research methods, and the quantity of quantitative research is relatively limited. Due to the lack of support from large-scale data and statistical analysis methods, it is challenging for researchers to comprehensively disclose the complex relationship between language and the ecological environment.

##### **2) Insufficiency of research on the discourse dissemination of social groups**

Regarding the dissemination mechanism, dissemination path, and influencing factors of ecological discourse among different social groups, the research conducted by researchers is not profound enough. Different groups have varying degrees of understanding and acceptance of ecological discourse, but the existing research has not fully explored how to formulate effective dissemination strategies based on the characteristics of different groups.

##### **3) Lag in emerging media research**

With the rise of digital and social media, the mode of information dissemination has undergone dramatic changes, but the research on EDA in these emerging platforms is relatively lagging. Researchers have conducted insufficient research on the characteristics, dissemination laws, and influence assessment of ecological discourse on social media platforms, and have not fully explored its potential in promoting the change of ecological protection awareness and behaviors.

In future studies, scholars should actively adopt quantitative research methods, such as questionnaire surveys, experimental research, and big data analysis, widely collect multi-source data, and utilize statistical models to deeply analyze the relationship between language characteristics and ecological environment variables, so as to provide a more solid scientific basis for EDA. The dissemination differences of ecological discourse in different social groups, should be focused on. For example, for the adolescent group, research on how to integrate popular culture elements into ecological discourse to improve their acceptance and dissemination willingness.

What's more, scholars should closely follow the development trend of digital and social media, deeply investigate the characteristics, dissemination patterns, and influence of ecological discourse on emerging platforms, make full use of its interactivity and extensiveness advantages.

Beside, in the context of globalization, scholars should summarize the commonalities and differences based on the characteristics and practices of ecological discourse in different cultures and regions, provide diverse ideas and methods for global ecological protection; at the same time, combine the characteristics of local culture and ecological environment.

Finally, as the ecological environment and social culture are constantly changing, ecological discourse also evolves accordingly. Therefore, scholars should continuously track the dynamic changes of ecological discourse, conduct long-term research, grasp its development trend and law, and provide timely and effective references for the formulation and practice of ecological protection policies.

## 5. Conclusion

Through systematic sorting, this study finds that there are several urgent improvements in current EDA research. In terms of theoretical framework, the existing research overly relies on the theory of systemic functional linguistics and lacks the integration and innovation of interdisciplinary perspectives. Secondly, the research medium is relatively single, failing to pay sufficient attention to the characteristics of ecodiscourse in emerging forms of communication such as multimodal discourse and social media. Especially at the level of technical application, EDA research has not yet fully integrated advanced technological tools such as Deepseek, and the depth and breadth of discourse analysis need to be improved. In addition, there is a disconnect between theory and practice in existing research, which fails to effectively promote the popularisation and implementation of ecological literacy education. Therefore, future EDA research should focus on constructing an ecological discourse analysis framework with Chinese characteristics, digging into the ecological philosophical connotations of local cultural contexts, and helping China's ecological civilisation to spread abroad. This study still has several limitations. In terms of technical methodology, limited by the research conditions, the study fails to adopt the most cutting-edge analytical techniques, and fails to conduct a more systematic and in-depth analysis of China's EDA research in the decade of 2013–2024, which affects the comprehensiveness of the research results. In terms of analysis dimensions, the examination of multimodal discourse characteristics is not deep enough, especially the dynamic discourse analysis of emerging social media platforms needs to be strengthened. In addition, due to the limitations of the sample size and scope, the generalisability of the research findings still needs to be further verified. These limitations also point out the direction for future research, and it is suggested that subsequent studies can combine more advanced technological tools and expand the analysis perspective in order to promote the innovative development of EDA research.

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## Authors' contributions

Yishan Ma is the first author and is responsible for conceptualization, writing the original draft, resources, investigation, formal analysis, data processing, review and editing. Xinyue Zhang is the co-first author with an Equal Contribution Status, and is responsible for conceptualization, writing the original draft, visualization, resources, investigation, formal analysis, data processing, review and editing. Weiwei Zhang is the corresponding author, and is responsible for conceptualization, formal analysis, review and editing.

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## Competing interests

As the authors of this manuscript, we hereby declare that we have no financial, professional, or personal interests that could potentially conflict with the content or interpretation of the research findings presented herein.

## Informed consent

Obtained.



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No additional data are available.

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