An Ecolinguistic and Discursive approach for Upscaling Cycling

KW: Language Marketisation; Growthism; Automobility; Reframing; Well-being.

Thesis: The language we use, even when promoting active mobility, is deeply influenced by a market-related discourse and by “growthism” (Halliday 2001), thus revealing why this kind of language is particularly detrimental when aiming to promote cycling, given the deep “tight ideological symbiosis between the values promoted by automobility (individual freedom and autonomy) and the rationalities of neoliberalism” (Walks 2015, 10-11).

Summary: Cycling Mobility and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) have rarely met before in academic literature. They are brought together here under the framework of Ecolinguistics, which aims to question the worldviews underpinning our current unsustainable civilization and to find new discourses, frames, metaphors that work better (Stibbe 2014, 217). CDS focus on ‘social wrongs’ (Fairclough 2016, 91), that is forms or orders which are detrimental to human well-being and situations in which unequal power relations are favoured and sustained by discursive practices. This paper is based on the results of a study (Caimotto, 2020) which brings together insights from the work of linguists on the marketisation of language (Mautner 2010), on the ways in which we frame the environment (Lakoff 2010) and draws inspiration from System Thinking (Meadows 2008).

This study aims to reveal the risks of market-related framing and to promote reframing strategies that could prove more effective when promoting cycling. At the same time, Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin 2004) is employed to reveal the linguistic features that work positively towards the construction of a more effective language. The examples are drawn from the following case studies: the 2016 white paper ‘Sustainable Urban Transportation. Creating Green Liveable Cities’, the 2017 ‘EU Cycling Strategy’ developed by the European Cyclists’ Federation (ECF), the 2018 Mayor’s Transport Strategy and the Cycling Action Plan for London and the 2020 report “Climate Safe Streets” by the London Cycling Campaign (LCC).