Encyclopedia of Human-Animal Relationships

A Global Exploration of Our Connections with Animals

Volume 3: Eth–Liv

Edited by
Marc Bekoff

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For my parents, who always encouraged the animal in me.

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idea that they are creatures worthy of worship. That is, for every carefully illustrated *Guess How Much I Love You* or subtle *Velveteen Rabbit*, there are dozens of storybooks that show rabbits as childish, cute, not very bright, and prone-to-mischief animals whom nobody cares all that much about. This devaluation, in turn, has led to a devaluation of rabbits themselves—as pets, as livestock, and as wild animals in need of study and protection.

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Susan Davis

Literature
Human Communication's Effects on Relationships with Animals

To understand how human communication both informs and shapes human relationships with animals, one must first accept the idea that human languages and their associated communicative practices do not constitute a disinterested mirror that people use to simply reflect an objective reality. Rather, there is no absolutely neutral way of apprehending and representing the world. Because meaning is not fixed but fluid, humans use their symbolic systems—sometimes consciously, but generally unconsciously—to negotiate and construct understandings of reality. Thus, how people communicate about animals helps inform the way they think about animals and shape the way they experience animals.

Communication Carries an Action Plan

Every instance of communication serves to negotiate and construct meaning. If one refers to "the human relationship with *other* animals," the inclusion of the word "other" before the word "animals" emphasizes the state of humans as animals themselves. This is contrary to the popular usage of the term "animals," which has conventional meanings that generally exclude humans. A reader might take the next step and ask, How does this particular popular usage of the word "animals" serve to construct knowledge of the human relationship with animals—through its repeated usage does it help reproduce the idea that humans are different from animals or are not animals? Or a reader might ask, Why is this perception of humans as different or separate from animals ingrained in the way we communicate—do overarching cultural, scientific, economic, religious, or other social forces help maintain this understanding? These are precisely the types of questions asked by scholars who study discourse.

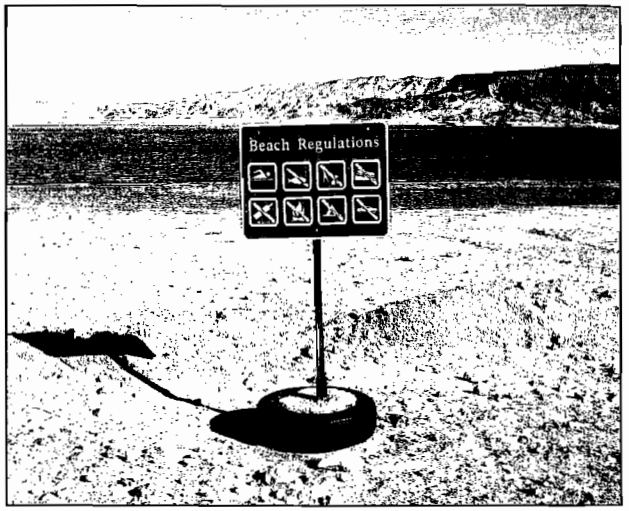
French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926–84) developed the theory that discourses, or systems of language and representation, are productive, net-like organizations of communication that permeate society at every level with power relations. For Foucault, not only do discourses produce meaning, but this meaning also regulates the way people behave and constructs the way people view themselves and the world. Contemporary scholars have been profoundly influenced by this idea. This move toward discourse, or the cultural or discursive turn, is one of the most significant paradigm shifts in the social sciences to occur in recent years.

The level of words is a good place to start, looking at small-scale but important elements of discursive systems and their connection to the human relationship with animals. When a criminal is described on the evening news as "an animal," or a survivor of genocide exclaims, "We were treated like animals," certain culturally conventional meanings are associated with the word "animal." In the criminal's case, "animal" carries the connotation that one is violent and out of control; in the survivor's case, "animal" connotes that one is unworthy of respect or even life. Likewise, when someone calls another a "chicken" or a "pig," certain meanings are conventionally associated: "chicken" connotes cowardly, and "pig" connotes gluttonous or filthy. Although it may be obvious that the popular connotations in these instances are negative and often inaccurate (chickens bravely protect their chicks, and pigs avoid messing their living areas, tend not to overeat, and lack functional sweat glands to even "sweat like a pig"), scholars argue that these meanings serve to reinforce and are reinforced by larger-scale socially constructed understandings about animals.

So, how do these animal metaphors work to actually inform or shape knowledge? Without associated meanings, words are neutral symbols. It is through the sociocultural constructive process of communication that humans negotiate what these symbols signify. The words are generated within larger discourses and get their meaning by virtue of their relatedness to other words, grammars, and practices within their respective systems. In turn, the particular uses of words help to uphold a respective knowledge system, or ideology, giving hidden assumptions the appearance of being merely common sense, of being normal (as it should be), natural (as it is supposed to be), and neutral (neither bad nor good and having nothing to do with power).

The examples of "animal," "chicken," and "pig" are that of metaphor, and more extensive animal metaphors permeate discourse about the human relationship with animals. For example, one Western metaphor for animals is that of commodities or machines that generate resources for human consumption (e.g., "animal units" in agricultural talk). Metaphors, like other symbolic elements of communication, help to shape knowledge by privileging some options of conceptualizing and concealing others. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors often serve as guides for future action that will fit the metaphor. Such action will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. Metaphors, in this sense, can be self-fulfilling prophecies. If, in different discourses, an animal is seen as a dumb brute, a spirit guide, a majestic icon, a loved companion, a pest, a respected member of a shared ecosystem, a pet, or a powerful and sacred entity, that animal will accordingly be treated as such.

Scholars who study discourse assert that all communication is *interested*. By this, scholars mean that all communication contains an action plan of how to think about something or how to act with or toward something. Dominant ways of representing animals, therefore, favor certain ways of seeing and thinking about and relating with animals. At the same time, alternative ways of representing animals that might encourage different relations are often rendered difficult to select in part because taken-for-granted dominant representations preclude other such choices.



Texts of official discourses, in this case a municipal sign, symbolically represent animals in certain ways. This sign on a Miami boardwalk positions animals as equivalent to machines and vice, objects used for entertainment and exercise that can be a nuisance or dangerous to people taking a stroll. Symbolic representations help inform the way people perceive and experience relations with animals. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

Word and Grammatical Choice and Meaning

Some scholars argue that certain language choices help perpetuate a widespread phenomenon of human discrimination against other animal species, or speciesism. For instance, Joan Dunayer argues that in English, through the popular pronoun choice of "it" for most animals, humans erase not only animals' genders, but also their very uniqueness. By calling an animal "it," humans group that animal with lifeless objects, robbing the animal of sentience and the capacity to feel, think, and have consciousness.

More than mere word choice, scholars argue that grammar demands attention because communicators are generally less conscious about choices of grammar than about words. Grammar conveys latent ideology, or hidden cultural assumptions, and is powerful in shaping realities and reproducing "common sense," knowledge that appears natural and neutral but instead always is socially produced. For instance, some scholars argue that English grammar has been culturally constructed to privilege human agency—or the ability to consciously effect change—and conceal animal agency. Examples include choices about passive or active voice through verb arrangement and choices about transitivity through the order of a sentence that determines the "who does what to whom." English grammar use tends to set up the human as the active subject (the one who does things to others) and the nonhuman animal as the passive object (the one to whom things are done). For instance, in English and in some other languages, humans raise, breed, train, fatten, and control animals. Try to put these relations into grammatical arrangement where the animal has equal or more agency, and one will find it difficult with the English grammatical tools available.

On the other hand, certain languages, including many nonindustrial cultures' languages, offer more refined grammar that reproduces the human-animal relationship as interrelated rather than causal with human as agent. An alternative, for instance, is found in the case of certain animist cultures, in which animals are often seen as equal to humans, if not more powerful, and are grammatically represented as having agency used for or against humans.

Strategic Discourse

Although much of the discourse discussed so far has been communication that circulates among people in everyday interactions, in certain instances, communication is used more deliberately to legitimate certain relations with animals. Many such strategic discourses exist. An example to provide further illustration would be an institutional discourse such as meat-industry discourse.

Cathy Glenn examines how the meat industry uses two codependent discursive strategies to construct consumer support: "doublespeak" and speaking animals. The first strategy, "doublespeak," is the use of sterile language that is intentionally misleading by being ambiguous or disingenuous to hide violent processes internal to the industry. For example, in discussing internal practices, the industry uses the term "euthanasia" to describe the practice of workers killing piglets born too small (for industry uses) by holding their back legs and slamming their heads against the floor. The word "euthanasia" represents the practice as humane and conceals—and in the process condones—the details of the act and the inflicted violence and suffering. The second strategy, the use of "speaking" animals in advertisements to sell meat, involves smiling cartoon cows sitting on a grill or cartoon shrimp eating tiny "popcorn" shrimp. This strategy of showing happy animals cooking or eating themselves ironically works to construct ways of thinking that obscure the suffering of animals killed for their meat and endorse industry practices even in the face of serious concerns raised by environmental and animal advocates.

Arran Stibbe looks at how meat-industry publications use linguistic devices—from semantic classification schemes to pronoun usage—that work to reproduce ideological assumptions that make animal oppression seem both inevitable and benign and that encourage the disregarding of pain and suffering for the sake of market profit. One example is the industry's use of metonymy, or the symbolic use of a single characteristic or part to stand for a more complex whole. An excerpt from industry text provides an example: "There's not enough power to stun the *beef* . . . you'd end up cutting its head off while the *beef* was still alive." In this case, the more complex whole of a living cow is metonymically symbolized by the product the industry gets from killing the cow, creating the meaning of a cow as a meat resource for humans and concealing the meaning of killing a live, sentient being. One may imagine what the use of an alternative metonym, such as the cow's relational role (e.g., "There's not enough power to stun the calf's mother) would do to shift meaning.

Mastery View as Dominant Discourse

Discourse can be talked about at different levels, such as at the level of discourse in everyday communication (e.g., friends or strangers talking), at the level of strategic or

institutional discourses (e.g., industry or scientific communication), or at the level of more widespread cultural discourses (e.g., overarching values and norms that infuse all scales of communication). Existing cultural discourses about the human relationship with animals include but are not limited to mastery discourse (humans having a relationship of dominion over animals), stewardship discourse (humans having a relationship of overseeing and taking care of animals), and mutuality discourse (humans having an interdependent relationship of reciprocity and respect with animals).

The dominant cultural discourse of human relations with animals in many Western settings is one of mastery. This mastery discourse is reproduced in economic, scientific, religious, governmental, and other institutional discourses and on an everyday interpersonal communication scale. The power humans exercise over other animals is both coercive (by force) and material (real and physical), and the coercion and its material results are both culturally justified and legitimated via this mastery discourse.

A core value assumption in mastery discourse is anthropocentrism, in which other animals are constructed as inferior to humans. Anthropocentrism shares traits with other oppressive discourses of racism and sexism. In anthropocentric discourse, nonhuman animals are in a similar role to that of the oppressed minority in racism or women in sexism. The animal is posited as the subordinated "Other" and the human is in the role of the dominating and oppressive "Center." Val Plumwood explores how the shared discursive traits of anthropocentrism, racism, and sexism include radical exclusion (through the Center seeing the Other as both inferior and radically separate); homogenization (in which the Center stereotypes the Other as interchangeable or replaceable); denial or backgrounding (in which the Center represents the Other as inessential and not worth noticing); incorporation (in which the Center defines the Other in relation to the Center, as lacking the Center's chief qualities, and devalued); and instrumentalism (in which the Center reduces the Other to a means to the Center's ends rather than according the Other value in its own right).

Much in the same way that discursive structures of racism and sexism set limits not only for the human objects of these discourses, but also for the perpetrators, anthropocentric discourse not only leads to the detriment of other animals but also distorts and limits the possibilities for those humans who use anthropocentric discourse. Mastery discourse constrains who people are and what they can become as humans relating to other animals—regulating people to hierarchical roles and indifference toward animals and denying alternative human-animal relationships.

Counterdiscourses

Nevertheless, although dominant meanings are reproduced, alternative meanings are also introduced and negotiated in communication, bringing with them different ways of understanding and practicing human-animal relations. Those who wish to challenge the dominant mastery discourse should keep the cultural ambivalence, or tension, between the dominant discourse and such counterdiscourses in mind. Counterdiscourses, in fact, are always in circulation and provide openings to resist dominant understandings.

Yet, although counterdiscourses provide choices of how to represent the human relationship with animals, the choice is still a strained one. The selection of a counterdiscourse and its respective ideology requires the choice of rejecting the dominant discourse and, with it, the decision of whether to represent or compromise one's own values, to oppose or agree with one's more or less powerful interlocutor's discourse, to be heard or not be heard, to be celebrated or to be retaliated against.

Discursive Struggles at the Zoo

Ethnographic fieldwork at an American zoo provides an illustration of the struggle between dominant discourse and counterdiscourses with an example of a schoolchildren's tour passing by the gorillas. The tour guide, in her role as zoo authority and lead adult among a group of mostly children, has extensive power to use communication to both establish and texture the dominant themes and meanings. In the observations that follow, the discursive constructions drawn on by the tour guide include dominant mastery and stewardship discourses, animals as performers, and anthropocentrism. A few children attempt to put forth counterdiscourses of captivity, connection, and freedom.

When the tour stops at the exhibit, a two-and-a-half-year-old gorilla just a little smaller than the children runs up to face them. She raises her arms above her head and begins to loudly pound her palms on the glass that separates her from them. The tour guide discursively frames the gorilla's actions as playful, fun, and performative, saying, "This baby's being really cute over here"; "She is going to entertain us here"; "This baby over here's just playing up a storm on the window"; "If we gave her a drum set, it might be really interesting to see what she'd do."

The power to represent reality through communication is often a site of struggle. Different people represented this young gorilla pounding on her glass cage as performing for humans, as communicating, or as wanting to get out. Courtesy of Tema Milstein.

A child, however, counters the tour guide's statements by saying, "Maybe he wants to be let out." The guide then does quick work reframing and reclaiming the authority to represent, saying, "Yeah, you *think* so. I think she's just playin'." Nonlinguistic elements of discourse also work in representation—see how the guide uses emphasis on the child's "think" and deemphasis on her own "think" to differentiate the weight and accuracy of each of their statements, subordinating the girl's "think" to her own.

Another child then says this of the young gorilla, "She's trying to get the lock undone." The guide uses her louder adult voice to speak over this resistant discourse and continue the work of reframing, again using her deemphasized, superordinated "think" to help do the work: "I think she's just showing off for you. Would you guys want to leave? It's a *beautiful* environment. They get fed every day." Another child is facing the gorilla, and the gorilla is looking at the child as she pounds the glass. The child says to the gorilla, "Hi."

The children here have introduced resistant counterdiscourses. Their discourses favor recognitions of captivity and desires for freedom as well as a connection with a sentient being. In her positioning as the authority, however, the guide has the final word, as well as the physical (coercive) control over the children in deciding when they are to stay at this discursive site and when they are to leave. The guide's final communication points one last time to the "fun" the baby gorilla is having, legitimizing the guide's dominant representation and then removing the children from the sight and sound of the gorilla:

"And she's just having a good ol' time here pounding away—all right, *all right*, my eagles, we're going to move along; *eagles*, this way."

Such discursive struggles take place among people of less obvious power differentials—for instance, with two friends in conversation: the first friend may engage a counterdiscourse (e.g., that animals have emotional lives and should have more legal protections) while the second friend engages a dominant discourse (e.g., that animals have only basic instinct and should not have more protections). In this case, neither the counterdiscourse nor the dominant discourse may be wholly fulfilling choices for the first friend. The animal emotions and rights counterdiscourse may be either devalued or dismissed by the second friend, who wields power by aligning with a dominant discourse. Conversely, if the first friend chooses the dominant discourse, this requires deferring the ability to represent an alternative human-animal relationship that she or he may believe in or practice. This theoretical framework of discourse-counterdiscourse struggle helps point to hurdles for individuals who have notions of the human-animal relationship alternative to the mastery discourse, as well as to societal-scale hurdles that stand in the way of transforming human-animal relations.

Alternatives and Resistance

The scholarly focus on discourse aims not only to raise awareness about dominant discourses, but also to specify emergent practices of resistance to dominant paradigms and to discern possibilities for change. Looking at counterdiscourses is a productive way to do this. Other fruitful studies include looking at alternative nonmastery discourses that exist as dominant discourses within different cultures and at deliberately formed counterdiscourses that are intended to strategically shift the human relationship with animals.

Dominant cultural discourses that do not reproduce a mastery worldview include those that reproduce worldviews of mutuality, connection, cooperation, and reciprocity among humans and animals. An example is the discourse of Peruvian Andean-Amazonian peasants in which the notion of "communication" is inseparable from the notion of mutual nurturance among animals, nature, and humans. Julio Valladolid and Frederique Apffel-Marglin explain how, in this culture, "for humans, to make *chacra*, that is to grow plants, animals, soils, waters, climates, is to converse with nature" (2001, p. 648). Notice in the explanation the grammatical shift from humans as the sole causative agent ("make," "grow") to the use of the verb "converse" to signify mutuality and interdependence. In this cultural discourse, all animals and nature, not only humans, converse with one another to make and nurture the *chacra*, including "the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountain, the birds, the rain, the wind . . . even the frost and the hail" (p. 648).

Valladolid and Apffel-Marglin, two indigenous Peruvian Andean-Amazonian scholars and development practitioners, "deprofessionalized" themselves to return to the villages of their people and dedicate their work to sustaining their people's cultural discourse and practice. Whereas scholars must take care to avoid misrepresenting, essentializing, or romanticizing indigenous cultural discourses about the human relationship with animals, indigenous and non-indigenous scholars alike argue it would be tragic to waste such accumulated knowledge and redundant for scholars to generate models of human relations with animals without learning from sustainable and reciprocal ways of life that have been practiced and in some cases remain vital.

Numerous dominant cultural discourses mediate the human relationship with animals in ways that differ from Western mastery discourse. Scholars, however, caution that in looking for alternative discourses, one must be careful not to misrepresent the discourse as an ideal alternative. An example can be found in primatology studies discourse in Japan. Japanese scientists approach their primate subjects differently from their Western counterparts, in that they do not bring to their studies Judeo-Christian–informed notions of separation or of human stewardship or dominion over animals. Japanese concepts of unity with animals are not, however, without hierarchy, albeit within a more horizontal, Buddhist-Confucian–informed hierarchical framework of karmic rebirth (e.g., for one's wrong deeds in this life, one may be reborn in the next as an animal). Nor is the Japanese discourse without culturally condoned cruelty (e.g., children might throw rocks at the primates without correction from adults). Care must also be taken to note that, as within any national borders, there is not only one Japanese discourse; rather, there are many different animal discourses.

In highlighting various dimensions of Japanese primatology discourse, Donna Haraway cautions against "the cannibalistic Western logic" that readily constructs other cultural possibilities as resources for Western needs and action. This caution is necessary. At the same time, cautiously learning from a spectrum of cultural discourses can help open new paths of thinking that resist oppressive discourses.

Alternatives to mastery discourse are also deliberately formed and practiced by animal advocacy groups in an effort to resist animal oppression and transform human-animal relations. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), for instance, uses intentional discursive approaches to bolster its social change campaigns. The group has linked discourses of the Holocaust to the meat industry with its "Holocaust on your Plate" campaign. By this discursive link, PETA relates the human treatment of animals to the way Nazis treated their victims and relates the suffering and overwhelming numbers of animals killed to the suffering and overwhelming numbers of Holocaust victims. With the title of the campaign, PETA also discursively implies that meat-eaters are complicit in this suffering, similarly to or even more so than those who remained silent during the Holocaust. In this case, PETA enlists rabbinical authorities to use their subject positioning to legitimate this discursive campaign. This strategy of introducing ideas and meanings that sharply contradict the mastery discourse elicits attention-getting rebukes, sometimes from Jewish groups and individual Jews; the media cover the rebukes and, as a result, deliver PETA's message to a wider audience, some of whom may for the first time consider the massive suffering of animals caused by a meat-centered diet. Similarly, PETA has also linked slavery discourses to the circus industry, enlisting African American civil rights spokespeople as authorities to use their subject positioning to legitimate comparisons of the oppression of animals in the circus to that experienced by Africans during slavery; again, this may be met by attention-getting refutations of the similarities between human and animal slavery.

PETA has also accessed the discursive genre of pornography to create humorous and attention-getting pro-vegetarian commercials that situate meat-eating men as impotent and vegetarian men as virile. More recently, to draw attention to animal cruelty and human health risks associated with dairy industry practices, PETA created a "Milk Gone Wild" campaign, simulating "Girls Gone Wild" videos with strategic image and word changes (women bare cow udders instead of human breasts; instead of "No rules, no parents, and, of course, no clothes!" PETA's commercial states, "No rules, no parents, and, of course, NO COWS!"). PETA produced television commercial spots for both the pornography and the "Milk Gone Wild" campaigns to air during Super Bowl football halftimes, but the television networks broadcasting the games refused PETA airtime. The action of censoring these commercials illustrates the discursive struggle. The network, in its role as a mechanism of representation (or a gatekeeper that filters which representations will circulate), was able to dismiss and largely repress the alternative discourse.

PETA, in turn, precisely because of this dismissal, was able to make a media event out of the censorship and to draw attention to its alternative message.

Language Change

Because discourse is systemic, the problem of dominant discourses such as mastery discourse creating a wide gulf between humans and animals cannot simply be fixed by erasing certain words from the vocabulary. These erasures do little if the meanings and associations of the new words that replace them reproduce similar configurations of meanings. Struggles over discourse, however, are a necessary and interrelated part of wider struggles for change. For example, the feminist movement, in addition to battles on economic, domestic, and public fronts, has waged a protracted and successful struggle over nonsexist discourse. Deborah Cameron writes that eliminating the use of "he" as a generic pronoun in the English language does serve to help change the repertoire of social meanings and choices available. Thus, change in linguistic practice itself can be social change if it coincides with and contributes to larger-scale societal transformations.

In ways similar to feminist language activism, scholars have begun to offer suggestions of word and grammar change for the human relationship with animals, including the use of narration to convey a sense of individual animals' lives, grammatical choices that make animals subjects if they are the primary actors or victims (e.g., the horse approached the girl), and verbs that imply animal emotional intention (e.g., the deer "fled" instead of "ran"). Dunayer also suggests avoiding expressions that elevate humans above other animals (e.g., "the sanctity of human life"); human-animal comparisons that patronize animals (e.g., "my dog is almost human"); terms that portray animals relatively free of human control and genetic manipulation as dangerous or inferior (e.g., "feral cat"); category labels that vilify animals (e.g., "vermin" or "pests"); and overqualified reference to animal thought and feeling (e.g., "the prairie dog *seemed* to recognize" or "it squealed *as if* it felt pain"). Besides the dismissive charge of "political correctness," other more substantive challenges to such attempts at change include the colossal task of coming up with a consistent and effective overall discourse for expressing anti-speciesist thought.

Changing Understandings through Conscious Communication

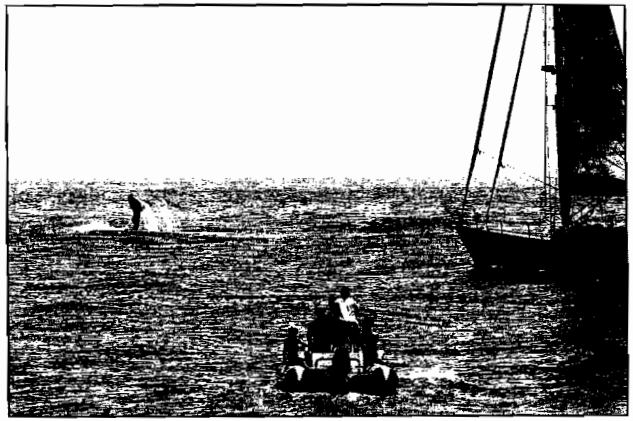
This essay began and will end with metaphors because they can be powerfully linked discursive structures in generating new knowledge of alternative human relations with other animals. One can use metaphors as tools for change by developing awareness about the metaphors one lives by and by having one's personal experiences with animals form the basis of alternative metaphors. In this way, one can develop what Lakoff and Johnson call an "experiential flexibility" to engage in an unending process of viewing one's life through new metaphors that open alternative ways of thinking.

Ethnographic research on whale watching in the Pacific Northwest provides an example. Many whale watch boat naturalists and captains frequently use the word "show" to describe the physically close and emotionally exciting experiences people have with the killer whales, or orcas. For example, a captain might tell another captain over the marine radio, or a naturalist might say to tourists on the boat, "That was quite a show today," after orcas swim close by the boat or engage in nearby boisterous activity, such as fin slapping or breaching out of the water.

Because each word gets its meaning by virtue of its relatedness to other words and discursive formations within its respective structure, one can interpret how the particular word choice of "show" relates to popular Western communication, informed by anthropocentric mastery representations of exciting or amusing animal behavior as performance or, more directly and ironically, representations by the marine entertainment industry of captive orcas trained to perform tricks for humans. Such mastery representations, however, are contradictory to the good-faith intentions of naturalists and captains to educate tourists about the behavior of whales in their natural habitats and to inform respectful understandings.

The wide and pervasive societal use of "show" to popularly describe positive human viewing experiences of animal behavior, however, makes a different choice of representation difficult. Well-intentioned naturalists and captains must select among existing discursive structures if they are to be understood. At the same time, the use of "show" can unwittingly serve to reproduce dominant discourse, directing a certain way of seeing the human relationship with the whales. Although this choice is metaphoric—indeed, the orcas' behaviors are not a show but are simply moments in their lives that humans happen to see—even the metaphoric nature of the word choice gets lost in the repeated use of "show," until "show" may become the very meaning of the representation.

When a couple of naturalists heard about this observation, they responded with a desire to come up with alternative ways of representing the experience, ways they felt more closely represented their actual experiences and feelings around the whales and the meanings they wanted to convey. One naturalist came up with "that was a really good



Tourists on a Pacific Northwest whale watch boat often communicate with each other to negotiate their understandings about whales. On-board naturalists also use communication to educate the tourists in particular ways about orcas. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

day," connoting that she felt fortunate and pleased to have been near the whales, and the tourists might also feel that way. Another naturalist came up with "that was a great encounter," connoting a valued and mutual interaction with the whales.

This type of reflection and the subsequent shifting of language to represent the experience itself can help shift thinking about human relations with animals. In this particular case, the naturalists were able to critically reflect on the whale watching industry's use of communication and then to consciously shift their use of language to fit both their actual perceptions of their experiences and their educational goals—to help tourists think about the orcas not as animals performing for human entertainment, but as animals who have their own value and agency, who make their own choices in their behavior and interactions, and whom humans were fortunate to encounter.

Scholars, therefore, argue that a crucial step to changing the human relationship with animals is in the act of deconstructing the use of language and associated communicative practices. One who wants to change human relations with animals must maintain a state of heightened discursive awareness and exercise a critical and self-reflexive sensibility. As such, one must refuse to take communication about animals at face value and must instead always question the status quo, or the preferred discursive "common sense" that circulates in communication about animals. A focus on discourse not only raises awareness about the discursive nature of human relationships with animals, but also allows one to begin to question the status quo of such relationships. For both scholars and everyday communicators, conscious communication can be both an emancipatory and a reconstructive undertaking, one of raising awareness about the social construction of human-animal relations and one of recognizing and creating compelling alternative visions of possible futures.

See also

Classification—*The Scala Naturae*
Ethics and Animal Protection—*Factory Farm Discourse*

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