

Animals and their places in news discourse: insights from cross-linguistic and diachronic perspectives

Anda Drasovean (King's College London, UK) and Emma McClaughlin
(Lancaster University, UK)

The discursive representation of animals in contemporary British English has been investigated by a recent project across a range of spoken and written discourse types. Two adjoining studies attached to the project focused on the representation of animals in the news. The two projects differed in that one took a cross-linguistic approach whilst the other examined discourse about animals from a diachronic perspective. The data for the diachronic project comprised three sub-corpora of letters and articles about red and grey squirrels, badgers, and hedgehogs published in *The Times* newspaper between 1785 and 2005. The cross-linguistic project compared how five case-study animals (bears, pigs, dogs, horses, and cats) are represented in a purpose-built corpus of contemporary (2012-2014) online news stories from Romania and the UK.

Both studies employ a corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach using a range of procedures such as keyword, collocation, word clusters, word sketch, and concordance analyses. Close analysis of representative texts from the corpora was also carried out to add qualitative depth. A number of common themes and patterns were identified between the two studies including animal population control, disease, and conservation.

One common salient pattern identified by both studies is that of spatiality. Disciplines such as animal geographies have highlighted the key role that spatiality plays in the representation of animals. For instance, the places inhabited by animals, whether real or imaginary, are fundamental to how animals are classified and conceptualised (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). A dominant paradigm in defining human-animal relationships is the distinction between human spaces and animal spaces, more commonly referred to as the nature-culture boundary. The language used to discuss animals in the analysed corpora illustrates different ways in which the nature-culture boundary is reinforced or renegotiated in news stories.

In the diachronic study, wildlife species that cross the nature-culture boundaries and enter what are considered to be "human" spaces are generally framed as problematic; however the corpus also revealed limited examples of how animals entering such spaces are not problematic if their presence is beneficial in some way. For example, hedgehogs eating garden pests are described as "invaluable friends" (1954); "the gardener's friend" (2005); and "garden favourites" (2005). The analysis of the Romanian corpus suggests that, in the Romanian context, wildlife species such as bears are most frequently described as problematic. For example, news stories about bears often report cases in which they cross into human territory and attack humans or domestic animals. In these stories, the frequently recurring phrase "marginea padurii" (the edge of the forest) defines and reinforces the boundary between human and animal territory.

Using this, and similar illustrative examples, we discuss the benefit of a combined cross-linguistic and diachronic approach to the corpus-assisted discourse analysis of language about animals. We propose that the cross-linguistic and

diachronic lenses can be used to complement the investigation of any social, cultural, and political issue for which a synchronic, monolingual corpus-linguistic approach might traditionally be used.

References

Philo, C., & Wilbert, C. (Eds.). (2000). *Animal spaces, beastly places*. London; New York: Routledge.