Verbal Vivisection

Animal Abuse and the English Language

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Íris Lilja Ragnarsdóttir

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Íris Lilja Ragnarsdóttir
Kt.: 051181-4419

Leiðbeinandi: Matthew Whelpton
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ABSTRACT

Deceptive and evasive use of language plays a major role in human exploitation and abuse of animals. With language comes power and responsibility. Without the linguistic means for their own defence, animals are currently situated at the deepest level of oppression. This essay explores issues in the linguistic exploitation of animals, focusing mainly on lexical semantics and grammatical construction.

Firstly, the historical and philosophical background to animal rights will be reviewed. Starting for real with the introduction of Christianity, animal exploitation in the Western world has culminated over the last century. However, in recent decades, people have started to see through the deceptive discourse surrounding animal exploitation and have begun the battle for animals’ rights.

Secondly, the relation between language and power will be examined through the discourses surrounding warfare and women. Emphasis is placed on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which builds on the notion that language influences thought.

Lastly, the role that language plays in perpetuating animal exploitation will be explored and the importance of attitude change emphasised. Linguistic devices such as euphemisms, jargon, derogation and possessive and passive forms promote emotional and cognitive distance from animals and foster the speciesist beliefs that sustain their abuse. The discussion adopts a moderate version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and is largely based on Joan Dunayer’s book Animal Equality: Language and Liberation (2001). A list of suggestions to alternative language can be found in the appendix.

The central thesis is that as long as our unjust treatment of animals stays linguistically hidden our attitudes towards animals are unlikely to change and they will continue to suffer.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, more and more people have joined the battle for animal rights and as their voices get louder it gets harder to cover up the unjust treatment of animals. One of the most powerful tools man has against the animals is language. In fact, it can be said that it is the standard use of the English language that sustains the exploitation and abuse of animals. The consequences of people’s actions have disappeared from the language and both the victims and the perpetrators have been removed from the context. Animals retain a low status within our society because of the way they are talked about. To a great extent, the way we talk about animals mirrors the way we treat them. People rarely stop and think about how their actions are affecting countless animals. Most prefer to go about their day in their usual manner, eating meat, hunting for sport, wearing fur and buying cosmetics. Evasive and deceptive use of language enables people to continue their callous treatment of animals. When it comes to our and other species, we deceive ourselves. The language that maintains these deceptions ranges from everyday language to the highly specialized and is evident in almost all aspects of English, in particular in lexical semantics and the exploitation of grammatical construction.

This essay will explore issues in the linguistic exploitation of animals. First, the philosophical and historical background of animal rights will be examined. Then, the relation between language and power will be explored. Lastly, the role that language plays in perpetuating animal exploitation will be reviewed and the importance of attitude change will be emphasised. The discussion will mainly be based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which builds on the notion that language influences thought, and on Joan Dunayer’s work Animal Equality: Language and Liberation (2001). The title of this essay, Verbal Vivisection, is borrowed from
Dunayer (2001, p. 117) and refers to the purpose of the essay: the dissection of the 
linguistic ploys that facilitate and reinforce animal exploitation.

2. ANIMAL RIGHTS

Animal rights is something everyone should concern themselves with. 
Everyone, except perhaps strict vegans, participates in the exploitation of animals in 
some way or another. Here are a few examples. In 2008, the average Icelander ate 
roughly 25 kilos of chicken, 23 kilos of mutton, 21.5 kilos of pork, 12.5 kilos of beef, 
and 47 kilos of fish (Statistics Iceland, 2010). Most people own at least one pair of 
leather shoes, and some drive around in cars with leather seats or lounge on leather 
sofas after a hard day’s work. When people bathe they use a soap or shampoo of some 
kind. A very common ingredient in soaps is sodium tallowate, which is rendered from 
beef fat. Many alcoholic drinks either contain animal products such as dairy or are 
produced using filters made from animal parts such as fish bladders. Simple everyday 
activities might therefore involve more animal exploitation than people realise. Most 
people cannot deny the part they play in the exploitation of animals and for this 
reason they should concern themselves with their rights.

that animals should be treated well by people and not killed or used for scientific 
purposes” (p. 47). This is one simple way of looking at the term. However, in recent 
decades, people have increasingly concerned themselves with the rights of animals 
and as a consequence the term has become more specialised, depending on who is 
the philosophy behind animal rights can be split into two opposing categories, that is 
“animal welfare” and “animal rights” (p. 42). Animal welfare maintains that there is
nothing wrong with human exploitation of animals, for example for food, research or sport, as long as the human benefits outweigh the harm and the animals are not caused any unnecessary pain or treated inhumanely. The animal rights view, on the other hand, holds that all exploitation of animals is wrong and should be abolished. In other words, any animal pain or death should be unnecessary. In this way, the animal welfare view can be seen as a form of utilitarianism applied to animals, and the animal rights view can be seen as a type of Kantian philosophy (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 42). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) “offered an account of morality that places strict limits on how individuals may be treated in the name of benefiting others. Humans, […] must always be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means” (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 42). Those that follow the animal rights view have extended Kant’s view so that it applies to animals as well. In their eyes, it is always wrong to harm another being for ones own benefit, no matter how great it might be.

The animal rights view will be the main philosophy behind most of the ideas and arguments put forth in this essay. To understand animal rights people must also be familiar with the term speciesism, which is a key term within this field of study. The term, coined in the 1970’s, is not listed in all dictionaries or is often marked as informal. Peter Singer (2009) an Australian philosopher and a pioneer in the animal liberation movement, defines speciesism as follows: “Speciesism – the word is not an attractive one, but I can think of no better term – is a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (p. 6). That is to say, speciesism is species bias, in the same way as for example racism is race bias or sexism is sex bias. Singer (2009) explores the idea of speciesism further and notes that avoiding speciesism does not mean that people
must hold all life, e.g. the life of a dog and the life of a human, as equally important. In his view:

The only position that is irredeemably speciesist is the one that tries to make the boundary of the right to life run exactly parallel to the boundary of our own species. Those who hold the sanctity of life view do this, because while distinguishing sharply between human beings and other animals they allow no distinctions to be made within our own species, objecting to the killing of the severely retarded and the hopelessly senile as strongly as they object to the killing of normal adults. (pp. 18-19)

What Singer (2009) calls for is that all beings that are similar, whether they are categorized as human or nonhuman animals, have a similar right to life: “What we must do is bring nonhuman animals within our sphere of moral concern and cease to treat their lives as expendable for whatever trivial purposes we may have” (p. 20).

2.1 Attitudes Towards Animals

Today Man could perhaps be given the title “the ruler of all animals”. As humans we see ourselves as being in some way separate from other animals and believe we have special rights and powers on this planet and can do whatever we please. John Gray (2002), author of Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals, writes:

For much of their history and all of prehistory, humans did not see themselves as being any different from the other animals among which they lived. Hunter-gatherers saw their prey as equals, if not superiors, and animals were worshipped as divinities in many traditional cultures. The humanist sense of a
gulf between ourselves and other animals is an aberration. It is the animist feeling of belonging with the rest of nature that is normal. (p. 17).

Dunayer (2001) points out the absurdity of the way we tend to divide all animals into two groups, that is humans and other animals: “with equal validity we could categorize all animals as giant squids and non-giant-squids” (p. 13).

We have inherited our current attitudes to animals from previous generations of Western thinkers. According to Singer (2009), the roots of Western attitudes to animals are found in Judaism and Greek antiquity, which later united in Christianity (p. 186). There are plenty of examples of man’s “dominion” over the animals to choose from in the Bible, but this one seems especially fitting:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything”. (Genesis 9:1-3, as cited in Regan & Singer, 1989, p. 2)

This ancient Hebrew text clearly gives humans a special place in the universe, a near God-like status. As Singer (2009) points out, the Greek tradition was less uniform in its attitude towards animals (p. 188). Pythagoras (570-495 B.C.), for example, was a vegetarian and preached respect for animals. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), on the other

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1 The word *dominion* is perhaps not the best translation of the original Hebrew word, which is a verb that means “made to rule over” with care and respect. However, the English word *dominion* is often understood as “domination” (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. viii).
hand, believed that animals existed for Man’s benefit. He defined Man as the rational animal. To him, those with less reasoning abilities existed for those who had more (Singer, 2009, pp. 188-189). Christianity inherited these two views, that Man’s position in the world is special and that animals with lesser reasoning skills exist for his purpose, and then added the idea of the immortal human soul: “Human beings, alone of all beings living on earth, were destined for life after bodily death. With this came the distinctively Christian idea of the sanctity of all human life” (Singer, 2009, p. 191).

According to Singer (2009), very few Christians seem to have had any moral concern for animals (p. 193). One early Christian that wrote on animals was the Roman Catholic philosopher Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). He was doubtlessly plagued by the Bible’s take on animals, since he spent quite a lot of energy trying to justify its writings. However, for him the only reason for why cruelty to animals should be avoided was because it might lead to cruelty towards humans. This attitude, in Singer’s (2009) view, is the essence of speciesism (pp. 195-196). It is not until the 16th century that any writings that express real consideration for animals start to appear.

Writings on animals increased during the Renaissance (14-17th centuries), but the main motto of the period, revived from ancient Greece, was “Man is the measure of all things”. It is here that humanist thought starts to take off and our modern attitude to animals begins to develop. Gray (2002) defines humanism as “a doctrine of salvation – the belief that humankind can take charge of its destiny” (p. 16). During this time, emphasis was placed on the uniqueness, the free will, the potential and the dignity of Man, and in comparison animals were seen as being lowly and having a limited nature (Singer, 2009, p. 198). The status of animals had reached a new low.
As Singer (2009) notes, “If the Renaissance marks in some respect the beginning of modern thought, so far as attitudes to animals were concerned earlier modes of thought still maintained their hold” (p. 199). Nonetheless, it was also during this period that some of the first real animal advocates appeared. One of them, and perhaps the most famous, was Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who truly sympathised with the animals and became a vegetarian – an action greatly ridiculed at the time (Singer, 2009, p. 199).

The philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) has often been called the greatest adversary to animal rights. His theory, that animals are mere machines and that humans are the only beings that have a consciousness and a soul, became widespread and allowed scientists to start experimenting on animals, free of guilt. According to Descartes animals did not suffer, their response to pain was just a mechanical reaction (Singer, 2009, p. 200). The following is an eyewitness account from this period:

They administered beatings on dogs with perfect indifference, and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they felt pain. They said the animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted were only the noise of a little spring that had been touched, but the whole body was without feeling”. (Singer, 2009, p. 201).

It was also during this period that vivisection\(^2\) began. Anaesthesia did not exist back then. Gradually, the experiments started to reveal great similarities between humans and other animals and Descartes’ view became less plausible (Singer, 2009, p. 202).

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\(^2\) According to the *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare* (1998), “Vivisection’ literally means cutting into or cutting up live organisms”. Originally, that was how the procedure was done. Today the term has broadened, meaning “all experimental procedures that result in the injury or death of animals” (p. 73).
The Enlightenment (1650-1800), and the less religious attitude that came along with it, brought forth many new sympathetic thinkers, such as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). Although the period did not bring a great change to attitudes to animals, people slowly began to realise that animals can suffer. Bentham was one of the first to bring this fact into the daylight when he stated: “The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?” (Bentham, as cited in Singer, 2009, p. 203). A few decades later, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) wrote in his diary: “Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work, worthy of the interposition of a deity. More humble, and I believe, true, to consider him created from animals” (Darwin, as cited in Singer, 2009, p. 205). Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and *The Descent of Man* mark a revolution in human understanding of its origins. It is by now perfectly clear, unless one prefers religious explanations to scientific evidence, that man does not possess some divine position in the universe. Still our attitudes towards animals have not changed and even Darwinism has been used to put humans back on their pedestal. According to Gray (2002), “Darwinism is now the central prop of the humanist faith that we can transcend our animal natures and rule the Earth” (p. 31). That is to say, despite it by now being perfectly clear that we are animals like any other, humans have managed to maintain their pedestal position, claiming they have evolved beyond the rest of the animals. Man’s greatest glory is supposedly his passage from ape to human.

### 2.2 A Brief History of Animal Rights

The first bill to make cruelty to animals punishable was passed in 1822. It was proposed by an Irish landowner, Richard Martin, and stated that it was an offense “‘wantonly’ to mistreat certain domestic animals, ‘the property of any other person or
persons”” (Singer, 2009, 205). This bill mainly served the purpose of protecting people’s private property, not animal’s rights. Martin later started the first animal welfare organisation, later known as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Singer, 2009, 205).

The following is based on the entry “Animal Rights Movement”, in the Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare (1998, pp. 50-53). The first animal movements started appearing around a hundred years ago in Britain and mostly fought against vivisection. Organizations that fought for animal rights, in the modern sense, began in the 1960’s, for example the British Hunt Saboteurs Association and Greenpeace. In 1972 the controversial Animal Liberation Front started its operation in Britain. By the end of the Vietnam War animal rights movements had started to gain ground in the United States. Those who had taken a stand against the war also fought for the rights of women and other minority groups. Animals came to be included in their ideology and the horrors taking place in factory farms and laboratories were gradually revealed. Peter Singer can be credited for the founding of the modern animal movement, a strongly anti-speciesist movement, which began with the publication of his groundbreaking book, Animal Liberation, in 1975. The eighties was a decade of a lot of investigative work and protests. Animal rights gained more and more media exposure and huge organisations such as PETA and In Defense of Animals were established. By the 1990’s animal rights had become a force that could no longer be ignored. Many consumers started to take a stand and stopped buying fur and products that had been tested on animals. Vegetarians and vegans ceased to be a rare occurrence and restaurants, schools, and government-run institutes such as hospitals were forced to take up vegetarian options on their menus.
Today the core idea of the animal movement is to liberate animals from human oppression.

2.3 Animal Exploitation Today

Human exploitation of animals today covers a wide range of activities such as research, food and other product production, as well as entertainment such as zoos and hunting for sport. The list of horrors that animals are made to endure by humans is endless and gruesome. Instead of going into detailed descriptions of individual cases, some statistics and a description of general methods used in certain industries will be outlined in order to give the reader an idea of the sheer vastness and heartlessness of the exploits that are accepted and taking place within our society right at this moment.

It is impossible to find accurate data on how many animals are being used for research in the world today. Many countries that use animals in laboratories do not keep any records relating to animal experimentation. Out of the countries that do keep records, the United States and Japan are by far the largest users. In 1995, the United States used 13,955,000 animals and in 1991, Japan used 12,236,000. The estimated number of animals used annually in experiments is somewhere between 41-100 million (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 215). Britain has one of the strictest regulations regarding animal experimentation and it is one of only few countries whose data is reliable and detailed (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 215). If one takes a look at how many animals are being produced and sold as lab products, it becomes evident that the number of animals used, in the United States at least, is severely underestimated. According to Singer (2009), “a stock market analysis of just one major supplier of animals to laboratories, The Charles River
Breeding Laboratory, stated that this company alone produced 22 million laboratory animals annually” (p. 37).

Sadly, much of the research done on animals today is unnecessary. Repeatedly, research is being done only for the sake of research and experimenters neglect to address the basic question of whether the research serves any purpose. Too often, as Singer (2009) points out, “experiments inflict severe pain without the remotest prospect of significant benefits for human beings or any other animals. Such experiments are not isolated instances, but part of a major industry” (p. 36). Research, not unlike for example the war industry, has begun feeding of itself. Economically it has become too valuable to stop. The industry has become extremely large-scale with a huge market for numerous research products, including lab animals. In research related journals one can find advertisements like these:

(1) When it comes to guinea pigs, now you have a choice. You can opt for our standard model that comes complete with hair. Or try our new 1988 stripped down, hairless model for speed and efficiency.

(2) The latest animal research tool from Columbus Instruments is an air-tight animal treadmill for the collection of oxygen consumption data during exercise. The treadmill has isolated running lanes with separate electrical shock stimuli which can be configured for up to four rats or mice. (Singer, 2009, pp. 38-39)

Most likely corporations would not create such products unless they expected some profit to be had.

The standard methods of testing animals in laboratories include the acute oral toxicity test, which forces animals to ingest all sorts of non-edible products; the
Draize eye irritancy test, which has animals placed in holding devices from which their heads protrude allowing a substance to be conveniently placed in their eyes; inhalation studies, where animals are locked in a sealed chamber and forced to inhale different sprays and other chemicals; immersion studies, where animals are forced to be immersed in a substance of some sort; and injection studies, where a substance is injected into the animal. Usually, the experimenters are not obliged to use anaesthetics during these tests, and great suffering is caused to the animals (Singer, 2009, pp. 54-55).

Farm animals comprise the greatest part of the animals that are being exploited by humans. According to the Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare (1998):

The advent of agriculture and animal husbandry roughly 12,000 years ago produced a dramatic shift in the balance of power between humans and the animals they depended on for food. From being essentially independent coequals or superiors, animals became slaves or subordinates, entirely dependent on humans for care and protection. (p. 76)

It is hard to grasp how many animals are slaughtered annually in the world, but in the United States alone “the number of birds and mammals killed for food each year […] is around ten billion, or one and a half times the population of the world” (Singer, 2009, p. x). Factory farming is the standard method of food production today. It can be defined as “the mass production and daily slaughter of millions of other creatures for food in circumstances designed solely for cost and handling efficiency rather than the welfare of the animals involved” (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 168). These types of farms are common but “socially invisible”, and this, together with the
fact that using animals as commodities is socially acceptable in our society, leaves the practice of factory farming practically free from any ethical or moral scrutiny (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 168). The modern confinement methods of these farms were developed in the 1950’s and 60’s and the unnatural living conditions of the animals soon led to increased use of medicine to combat the ailments that began to plague the animals (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 168).

The most intense factory farming methods are being applied to poultry. According to the *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare* (1998):

They are kept in crowded conditions and subjected to debeaking. Perhaps most symbolic is the discarding of all male chicks in the process of producing laying hens. These chicks are simply gassed or dumped alive into plastic sacks in which they suffocate. Female chicks are integrated into the extraordinarily deprived conditions of the modern battery-cage system. (p. 169)

The dairy industry has also become very unnatural, with the cows being kept in a constant state of pregnancy and fed a mixture of chemicals in order to maximise their milk production. The cows, which under normal circumstances would live for up to twenty years, are kept for about six to seven years and then sent to the slaughterhouse (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 169).

Humans also use animals as commodities that can be used for entertainment or recreational purposes. Zoos, aquariums, circuses, hunting grounds and pet keeping are just a few ways in which animals are exploited for human enjoyment. Zoos, for example, vary greatly in size and quality. According to Dunayer (2001), “among more than 2,000 licensed U.S. exhibitors of nonhuman animals, fewer than 9 percent have sought and received accreditation by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association”.

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The zoo animals’ world only reaches as far as their unnatural enclosures, and they spend sixteen hours on average in their cages. They are usually kept indoors at night, in living spaces that are beyond the spectator’s view, but the conditions there are often much worse. Many animals like birds and reptiles never get to leave their glass cages (p. 74).

Some zoos call themselves wildlife conservation centres and boast of their captive breeding programs. However, much of the breeding being done is inbreeding, which leads to unhealthy offspring (Dunayer, 2001, p. 84). Furthermore, instead of spending money on conserving wildlife in zoos, maybe we should think about spending it on real wildlife conservation. As Dunayer (2001) points out, “as of 1990 it cost more than 46 times as much to keep one African elephant in a zoo as to safeguard sufficient natural habitat to sustain that elephant and countless other inhabitants” (p. 84). Something that people rarely think about is the fact that premature deaths are very common in zoos. No zoo can afford to keep a team of specialists that are capable of taking care of all the different species that are being kept in the zoo, and therefore, many animals die from negligence (Dunayer, 2001, p. 76). Also, there are so-called “surplus animals”, which are either killed or sold to facilities such as research centres or shooting operations (Dunayer, 2001,p. 87).

Unfortunately, the situations described above are just a fraction of the realities of billions of animals exploited by humans every day. The exploitation has become so naturalised and institutionalised in our society that we fail to see the injustice of our actions. What facilitates and reinforces the exploitation? Language that distorts and obscures the realities of the exploited animals does. As Arran Stibbe (2001) points out:
the coercive power used to oppress animals depends completely on a consenting majority of the human population who, every time it buys animal products, explicitly or implicitly agrees to the way animals are treated. This consent can be withdrawn as has been demonstrated through boycotts of veal, battery farm eggs, cosmetics tested on animals, and, by some, all animal products. It is in the manufacturing of consent within the human population for the oppression and exploitation of the animal population that language plays a role. (p. 147)

3. LANGUAGE AND POWER

Aristotle stated that Man is the most political animal of all because of his ability to use language (Joseph, 2006, p. 1). Today many believe that language is in fact political in its essence, that humans actually began using language for political reasons (see for example Dunbar, 1996). If this is true, then language must still be political, and politics are about power. Sociologists define power as “an individual’s or a group’s ability to influence another person or group” (Andersen, 2006, p. 89). Power can take many different forms, ranging from physical force to persuasion. Furthermore, it is institutionalised in society, that is to say, social institutions are structured so that they have power over others (Andersen, 2006, p. 89). Without language, people would not be able to exert as much power:

[…] language is the arena where the concepts of right (both in the sense of entitlement and in the sense of what is morally acceptable) and duty are created, and thus language actually creates power, as well as being a site where power is performed. (Jones, Peccei, Singh et al, 2004, p. 11).
Louis Althusser (1918-1990), the French philosopher, studied the relations between language and power and found that everything we believe in and hold to be true and commonsense is in fact constructs created by our social institutions. According to his theory, it is much easier to control our behaviour through our perception of reality than by using force (Jones et al, 2004, p. 11).

According to John E. Joseph (2006) “language is political from top to bottom” (p. 17). He explores this issue in his book Language and Politics, and to him “Power and politics are fundamentally about whose will, whose choices, will prevail” (p. 17). Not unlike Althusser, Joseph is sceptical about the source of our values and beliefs:

Who determines what is acceptable or offensive in a given language at a given time, and how? When I believe I am making choices in language, are they actually being forced upon me by some kind of hegemonic social structure? […] Are my interpretations of what I read and hear really mine, or are they too forced upon me by corporate and governmental interests seeking to control the way I perceive and think? (p. 17)

Joseph notes that these are questions that are difficult to answer since it is easy to go in circles and apply these same questions to the answers one might come up with. Nonetheless, these are important questions that must be explored. The following sections look at some of the effects the power of language can have.

3.1 Language and the Powerful: Warfare

John Locke (1632-1704) (2008) once wrote: “We should have a great many fewer disputes in the world if words were taken for what they are, the signs of our ideas only, and not for things themselves” (p. 314). In 1938, Stuart Chase published
his concerns about people’s language choices in his book *The Tyranny of Words*. His main concerns were, “How often do minds meet; how often do they completely miss each other? How many of the world’s misfortunes are due to such misses?” (p. v).

Chase emphasised the need for a closer examination of human communication, and used warfare as one example of the effects that language can have. If more people were aware of semantics, that is the meaning behind language, dictators like Hitler would not be able to accumulate power so easily. Chase (1938) uses a fragment from one of Hitler’s speech as an example of how “Abstract words and phrases without discoverable referents would register a semantic blank, noises without meaning” (p. 14):

> The Aryan Fatherland, which has nursed the souls of heroes, calls upon you for the supreme sacrifice which you, in whom flows heroic blood, will not fail, and which will echo forever down the corridors of history.

This would be translated:

> The blab blab, which has nursed the blabs of blabs, calls upon you for the blab blab which you, in whom flows blab blood, will not fail, and which will echo blab down the blabs of blab. (p. 14)

Chase (1938) then claims that there would be no danger of communication failure if the speech had stated that “Every adult in the geographical area called Germany will receive not more than two loaves of bread per week for the next six months” (p. 15).

In other words, people must be more aware of the meaning, or in this instance the lack of meaning, behind language. This example is quite extreme but it does adequately convey what Chase is trying to say, that too often we “think, speak and act in the dark” (p. 6). What is worse, sometimes we do so deliberately. Over 60 million people
were killed in the Soviet Union between the years 1917 and 1959. According to M. Heller and A. Nekrich, these murders were not concealed:

Stalin spoke openly about the ‘liquidation of the kulaks as a class’, and all his lieutenants echoed him. At the railroad stations, city dwellers could see the thousands of women and children who had fled from the villages and were dying from hunger. (as cited in Gray, 2002, p. 95).

As Gray (2002) points out, these facts were too uncomfortable to face and people chose to continue to live in denial (p. 95).

Another point that Chase (1938) stresses in his book is that there is nothing necessarily wrong with the words we are using themselves, rather with the meaning we put into them: “Language is no more than crudely acquired before children begin to suffer from it, and to misinterpret the world by reason of it” (p. 38). This is because of the language being taught to the children, not because of the children themselves. In other words, socialisation plays a major role in how we come to use language and consequently in how we interpret the world. This leads us to one of the main positions that have influenced linguists during the 19th and 20th centuries, the assumption that “language exerts a shaping influence upon thought” (Joseph, 2006, p. 113). Edward Sapir (1884-1939), the German-born American anthropological linguist, believed that “Language and our thought-grooves are inextricably interrelated, are, in a sense, one and the same” (as cited in Joseph, 2006, p. 113). His attitude to language was very positive to begin with, but he grew sceptic with time and began to believe that “innocent linguistic categories may take on the formidable appearance of cosmic absolutes” (Joseph, 2006, p. 114). In other words, he began worrying about the influence language might be having on people. Out of a later collaboration with his
protégé, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941), his most famous idea was born, the “Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis”. According to Ishtla Singh (2004), the theory is combined out of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism:

Linguistic relativity theorises that the languages of different cultures comprise distinct systems of representation which are not necessarily equivalent.

Linguistic determinism proposes that a language not only encodes certain ‘angles on reality’ but also affects the thought processes of its speakers. (Jones et al, p. 25)

Basically, this view argues that languages are deeply connected to the thought and culture of their speakers, and that “language is essential, not accidental, to cultural formation, cohesion and transmission” (Joseph, 2006, pp. 114-115). What is more, people seem to be unaware of the fact that they are following a linguistic system, and that this system is affecting the way they think (Jones et al, 2004, p. 25). However, in recent decades, this theory has been increasingly criticised by modern linguists such as Steven Pinker and Noam Chomsky (see for example Chomsky, 1986). Pinker notes that, as of yet, there is no scientific evidence to back up the theory that languages shape their speakers’ thoughts (1995, p. 58). Conversely, he points out that there are plenty of instances that indicate thought without language, and that new words, for example, could not be coined if thoughts depended on words (1995, p. 58; p. 67). Pinker, however, does not deny that language influences our thoughts:

“language surely affects thought – at the very least, if one person’s words didn’t affect another person’s thoughts, language as a whole would be useless. The question is whether language determines thought – whether the language
we speak makes it difficult or impossible to think certain thoughts, or alters the way we think in surprising or consequential ways” (2007, p. 125)

The linguistic arguments put forth in this essay will therefore rest on a moderate version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in which thinking is considered to be *influenced* rather than determined by language. The aim here is to examine animal related words and discourses and expose how they are an important factor in reinforcing speciesist attitudes and sustaining animal abuse.

Let us return briefly to the discourse on warfare. Sadly, humans seem to have learned nothing since the time Chase published his book. War continues to be a side effect of human society, and since 1950 there have been almost twenty genocides, of which at least three had more than a million victims (Gray, 2002, p. 92). According to Gray (2002), “What makes the twentieth century special is not the fact that it is littered with massacres. It is the scale of its killings and the fact that they were premeditated for the sake of vast projects of world improvement” (p. 96).

Undoubtedly, people’s use of language allowed for some of those atrocities. A recent example are the arguments made by the United States led coalition of governments that in 2003 brought on the war in Iraq. The arguments for going to war were mainly based on a 2002 CIA report on ‘Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programs’. As Joseph (2006) notes, the language of the report is not haphazard but rather structured in a very powerful way (p. 14). For maximum impact, the report opens with a few key statements like the following, all of which contain assertions of fact: “How quickly Iraq will obtain its first nuclear weapon depends on when it acquires sufficient weapons-grade fissile material” (as cited in Joseph, 2006, p. 14). By using *will obtain* and *when it acquires* instead of *could obtain* and *if it acquires*, the writers of the

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3 To be found mainly in chapter four.
report are stating that at some point weapons of mass destruction will be in the
possession of the Iraqi government. As it turns out, those were irresponsible and
empty assertions. Here, in the manner of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), it truly seems
that power produces knowledge.

3.2 Language and the Powerless: Women

Language reflects and reinforces the values we place on certain social groups.
Throughout history, more powerful groups in our society have dominated over less
powerful ones, such as women, slaves and animals, and language has served to justify
this sort of domination. This section will consider some of the language methods
being used to exert power over women and compare the discourse surrounding sexism
and speciesism. The case of animals will be discussed further in chapter four.

Feminism is based on the idea that men and women are not equal in society
because of social, not biological, factors (Anderson, 2006, p. 10). According to
Anderson (2006), “feminists generally see social institutions and social attitudes as
the basis for women’s position in society” and they “believe in transforming society
on behalf of women” (p.10). The language we use exerts great power over how we
perceive women and their roles within our society, and “by changing how we think
and speak we can communicate new meaning systems to others” (Anderson, 2006,
p.57). Language can act as a double-edged sword, since it can both reinforce cultural
stereotypes as well as produce changes in society. In this case, it can either perpetuate
sexism or combat it. Anderson (2006) points out that “Although it may seem trivial to
insist on non-sexist language […], changes in what we say can influence how we
think, and language can be used to break social stereotypes” (p. 57). In short, it is up
to the speakers how they are going to use the linguistic sword.
In *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction* (2004), Shân Wareing defines sexist language as language that “represents women and men unequally, as if members of one sex were somehow less completely human and less complex and had fewer rights than members of the other sex” (Jones et al, p.76). Given the unequal distribution of power between men and women in society, this section will focus on sexist language that diminishes women. It is important to note that sexism is so rooted in our culture and language that people frequently are not aware that they are using sexist language. Wareing (2004) gives various examples of how the English language system itself is sexist and how some ways of using the language is sexist (pp. 76-92).

Concerning the language system, firstly, she notes the asymmetric use of the generic term *Man*, which can be used for “all humans” or only “men”. The generic term *horse* on the other hand is symmetric in the way it consistently refers to all horses in general, irrespective of sex (p. 78). The use of titles is also asymmetrical, but the only existing general title for men is *Mr*, while women can bear the following three, *Miss*, *Mrs* or *Ms*. The women’s titles can reveal women’s marital status, as well as political opinions, since which title one chooses can say much about you. According to Wareing (2004):

The titles Miss and Mrs are a reminder of a time when the power relations between women and men were much more markedly unequal than they are today for most women living in Europe or the United States. Women were then regarded as the responsibility, or indeed the property, of either their father or their husband. (p. 79).

Secondly, Wareing (2004) notes how marked terms can be sexist. Usually, unmarked terms refer to males, while marked terms are used to describe females. This
can make the marked terms seem to deviate from the standard, for example in the
cases of *waiter* and *waitress*, and *actor* and *actress* (p. 80). Furthermore, terms which
apply both to men and women, such as *surgeon* or *professor*, are sometimes used as if
they only applied to men, as when people add *lady* or *woman* in front of the words,
thereby indicating that the terms usually refer to males (p. 80).

Thirdly, Wareing (2004) points to semantic derogation, but that is when words
referring to women acquire a demeaning connotation (p. 80). She uses the words
*master* and *mistress* as an example. The sentence “He is my master” usually means
something like “he is my boss”, while “she is my mistress” has acquired a sexual
connotation and would most likely be interpreted as “she is my illicit lover” (p. 81).
According to Wareing (2004), this example demonstrates that words relating to
women tend to lose status and that they often end up having sexual overtones.

In other cases, the words themselves are not necessarily sexist but rather the
discourse, that is to say sexist meaning is created through sentences or longer texts.
Wareing (2004) uses an example from *The Times* to illustrate this (generic terms are
in italics and gender-specific terms are in small capitals):

*People in their* twenties and thirties will have to work until *they* are 72 unless
*they* do more now to save for *their* retirement, a new report says. A *worker*
making typical contributions to a company pension scheme will either face a
big cut in *his* income at 65 or have to keep working for another seven years,
according to research by the Pensions Policy Institute. (27 February 2002, as
Wareing (2004) notes that such discourses do not seem gender-specific at first glance, but at second glance they refer specifically to men. According to her, this process is sometimes referred to as “disambiguating the generic term” (p. 82).

Finally, Wareing (2004) discusses explicit examples of sexism, or “direct insults or remarks which make inequality explicit, aimed at women rather than men” (p. 84). She quotes a journalist, from The Independent newspaper, trying to explain why The Oscars get so much media-coverage: “We get to see beautiful actresses and interesting actors” (p. 84). This illustrates how people often place greater emphasis on women’s looks rather than their personalities. In her book, Animal Equality: Language and Liberation, Dunayer (2001) examines the explicit sexist discourse surrounding animal metaphors. According to her, most animal metaphors foster their oppression by conveying contempt for animals. What is more, “When such metaphors denigrate all members of a human group – say, women or blacks – they also promote human political inequality” (p. 156). The degrees of insult are varying, ranging from chick, denoting a young girl, to vixen, characterising a malicious or domineering woman, especially towards men. Dunayer (2001) notes that some animal metaphors refer to the physical appearance of women, but not of men (p. 158). Dog, for instance, is normally used to mean an ugly woman or an unpleasant man. Again, the pressure that is placed on women by society to be attractive is evident.

Interestingly, as the philosopher Robert Baker has pointed out, some of the most derogatory female-specific animal metaphors have to do with domesticated animals, “those bred to serve human interests” (Dunayer, 2001, p. 158). According to him “they reflect a conception of women as mindless servants” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 159). Cows, for example, kept continuously pregnant and lactating, are used to describe fat and dull women, and female dogs or bitches, sometimes treated by dog
breeders with contempt, their only purpose being to deliver high-priced puppies, denote malicious and selfish women. Linguist Alleen Pace Nilsen uses chicken metaphors to describe women’s lives:

A young girl is a chick. When she gets old enough she marries and soon begins feeling cooped up. To relieve the boredom she goes to hen parties and cackles with her friends. Eventually she has her brood, begins to henpeck her husband, and finally turns into an old biddy. (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 159)

According to Dunayer (2001), “Comparing women to hens communicates scorn because hens are exploited as mere bodies, for their egg-laying capacity or flesh” (p. 159). She furthermore notes that, “derogatory nonhuman-animal metaphors rely on speciesism for their pejorative effect” (p. 157). That is, if it were not for our speciesist attitudes, animal metaphors like these would not be considered offensive. Before ending the discussion on women and animal metaphors it must be mentioned that many animal metaphors are also applied to men, such as shark, wolf and skunk. As Dunayer (2001) points out, “Almost exclusively, the quintessential nonhuman-animal epithets – animal, beast and brute – are aimed at men” (p. 161). However, it is when vulnerable groups are targeted when the metaphors become especially harmful.

Sexism and speciesism are in many ways related. In a patriarchal society women and animals are objectified, exploited and abused. They are hated, beaten, enslaved, sold for money and used for entertainment, as well as being considered inferior, emotional, irrational, childish and uncontrollable. Liberal feminists, starting with Mary Wollstonecraft, have traditionally argued that women, like men and unlike animals, have rational minds (Adams & Donovan, 1999, p. 2). In recent decades, a
new more broader feminist approach has emerged, sometimes referred to as eco-feminism, “which provides an analysis of oppression and offers a vision of liberation that extends well beyond the liberal equation, incorporating within it other life forms besides human beings” (Adams & Donovan 1999, p. 2). Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (1999) explore the connections between sexism and speciesism in their book, *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, and they believe that:

all oppressions are interconnected: no one creature will be free until all are free – from abuse, degradation, exploitation, pollution, and commercialization. Women and animals have shared these oppressions historically, and until the mentality of domination is ended in all its forms, these afflictions will continue. (p. 2)

As long as such deeply rooted prejudice as speciesism is allowed to thrive, other prejudices, such as those against women, race minorities and disabled people will survive. All of these prejudices rest on hierarchy, placing the powerful at the top and the powerless at the bottom. Speciesism rests on a hierarchy that places humans above all animals, just like sexism towards women places men at the top. These hierarchies are interconnected and have been enforced and maintained through language; women have become “fat cows” and female animals are inseminated in “rape racks”⁴. Similarly, animals and women are objectified through a single metaphor that allows for them to be perceived of as something delicious and consumable: the meat metaphor. In her book, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical*

⁴ A restraining device invented by Harry Harlow (1905-1981), still commonly referred to as a *rape rack* (http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/03/21/monkey_love/).
Theory, Adams (2006) gives the following analysis of the linguistic process behind the metaphor:

“a subject first is viewed, or objectified, through metaphor. Through fragmentation the object is severed from its ontological meaning. Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents. The consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of importance in itself” (p. 58).

That is, when animals are seen as something to please palates (“meat”) and women are seen as something to fulfill sexual appetites (“pieces of meat”), their individuality and personhood is severed from their very being, allowing for their exploitation and abuse. Sexism and speciesism manifest themselves in many ways, but they thrive mostly through language.

4. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ANIMAL ABUSE

One of Descartes’ main arguments for why animals were like machines was the fact that they could not speak like humans:

[…] it is a very remarkable fact that there are none so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts; while on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect and fortunately circumstanced it may be, which can do the same. […] And this does not merely show that the brutes have less reason than men, but that they have none at all, since it is clear that very little is required to be able to talk. (as cited in Regan & Singer, 1989, pp. 14-15).
In a similar manner, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) maintained that an absence of language equalled an absence of consciousness. For him, “Since animals lack a system of conventional signs, they lack the fundamental tools for a mental life” (Regan & Singer, 1989, p. 45). However, today we know that it requires special speech organs to be able to speak like humans. Most linguists also agree that animals do have “languages” of their own or “systems of signs”, which are carried out in various ways such as through sound, “scent, light, ultrasound, visual signs, gestures, colour, and even electricity” (Dobrovolsky, Katamba & O’Grady, 1997, p. 625). Also, as Singer (2009) points out, human language is not a neat dividing line between humans and animals anymore since it now appears that chimpanzees can be taught a sign language (pp. 13-14). The Wittgenstein debate, that animals lack the tools for a mental life, triggered the rooted belief that all animals act on instincts, which has been a major obstacle in the process of determining consciousness in animals. Singer (2009) points out that language may require some abstract thought, but that most states of consciousness, as the ability to feel pain, have nothing to do with language. Bernard Rollin also notes that animals can anticipate and remember, but these are states that allow them to feel fear and learn (Regan & Singer, 1989, p. 50). What is more, recently, chimpanzees have been found to pass a test that shows they have a self-concept (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 65). To deny animals consciousness, therefore seems a rather risky business. However, perhaps the most important point in this debate is that a being’s ability to use language has nothing to do with how they should be treated.

It is true that humans are the only animals that communicate in a sophisticated spoken and written language. This fact lays on us certain responsibilities. Because our language enables us to convey complicated ideas and values, we should make the best
of it and make sure we are using it in a responsible manner. We should not use language to twist the truth and take advantage of other species. The animals themselves obviously cannot stand up and demand their rights. Their wellbeing therefore depends on how we act. As Dunayer (2001) writes: “To achieve justice for all beings, we must overcome speciesism’s linguistic ploys. We think in words and act them out. Equitable laws and practices require equitable language” (p. xviii). The following two sections give examples of how our current deceptive and evasive use of language sustains the exploitation and abuse of our next of kin, the animals. Most of the analysis is based on Dunayer’s aforementioned work (2001), and, unless noted otherwise, the page numbers quoted refer to her work.

4.1 Twisting the Words Against Animals: Lexical Semantics

Surely, Sapir and Chase would agree that today, it seems, many people place too much trust in words, as if they stood for absolute truths. Consumers of animal-derived products, for instance, do not seem to doubt the words on the packages, but happily buy eggs from factories bearing names such as “Happy Hen Egg Ranch”, however hellish they might be. The producers and sellers of such products take advantage of this and twist the words to their own advantage. What is more, most people are guilty of promoting animal inequality and exploitation, sometimes without realising it and sometimes in order to soothe their conscience, for example by using animal-inspired derogatory terms, or by resorting to euphemisms. Our word choices and word definitions matter, especially in regard to the discourse surrounding animals, a discourse in which humans have all the say. The following subsections examine how lexical semantics, or words and the meaning we put into them, serve to sustain animal abuse.
4.1.1 Historical development

It is interesting to look at how the use of some animal-related words has developed over the course of history. The word *animal*, for instance, which is derived from Latin and means “living being, being which breathes”, drove out the word *beast*, which was the standard term for animal up until the 16th century\(^5\). Beast then came to denote “brutish humans” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Today, the word *animal* has begun to have the standard meaning of “a living creature that is not a human”, and is furthermore used to describe a very violent, cruel or rude person (Macmillan English Dictionary). Humans have seen themselves as being separate from the rest of the animal kingdom for a while now, and it seems we have resorted to tactics such as semantic shifts, narrowings and broadenings in order to maintain and widen the gap.

4.1.2 Dichotomy

Currently our language produces a false dichotomy between humans and animals. In numerous ways, dictionaries define humans and other animals as polar opposites, for instance by contrasting such terms as *human intelligence* and *animal instincts*, or *humane* and *inhumane*. Furthermore, we *eat* but they *feed*, women are *pregnant* and *nurse* but other female mammals *gestate* or *lactate*, when dead we become *corpses* but when animals die they are *carcasses* or *meat*, we *love* but they *bond* or *mate*; and we form *friendships* but they show *affiliative behaviour* (p. 2; p. 37). In all these examples the same actions are being described, but apparently human superiority demands a separate vocabulary. According to Dunayer:

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\(^5\) Before the 13th century the Old English term *deor* was the standard, meaning “wild creature” (Online Etymology Dictionary).
Separate lexicons help maintain a false dichotomy that bolsters human conceit and soothes human conscience. The greater the apparent psychological distance between nonhuman and human animals, the more secure human’s assumption of species superiority and uniqueness. This assumption provides a rationale for exploitation (p. 23)

Furthermore, many dictionary entries that promote such polarity seem to be based on political rather than scientific assumptions. Definitions of *Man* include statements like “has a capacity for abstract reasoning”, when it has actually been scientifically proven that this is not limited to humans. Sea lions, chimpanzees and gorillas, to name a few, have all been found to have a capacity for abstract thinking (pp. 18-20).

### 4.1.3 Jargon

Technical language, or jargon, promotes emotional detachment from animals. This is especially evident in animal research reports, but Dunayer notes several terms that soften the abuse taking place: *bilateral lid suture* stands for “sewing both eyelids shut”; *thermally injured* means “scalded”; *to fast* means “to starve”; *to stress* means “to torture” or “to cause to suffer”; and *to treat* or *administer* can basically be substituted with “to harm” (p. 110). The most taboo of words, *to kill*, is hardly ever used, instead researchers *produce lethality, destroy, terminate, discard, dispose of, put down or put to sleep* (p. 111).

Jargon is also used in other industries, such as factory farming. Those in charge of the industry do not refer to it as factory farming or livestock industry, but rather as *animal agriculture*. This term evokes images of content grazing farmyard animals, when the animals might actually never be allowed to stand on grass or see daylight. As Dunayer points out, “Whereas *industry* connotes environmental damage
and profit motives, *agriculture* suggests an ecologically friendly enterprise based on need” (p. 125). Similarly, the horrible treatment that the animals have to undergo is softened by using jargon such as: *individual accommodation* instead of a stall with iron bars and a concrete floor; *nursery* instead of cages stacked in rows; *induced molting*\(^6\) instead of starving; *trimming* instead of debeaking; *branding* instead of burning; and *neuter*\(^7\) instead of castrate (pp. 126-131). As with research jargon, factory farming jargon always substitutes the word *to kill*. Instead words like *to cull*, *to unload*, *to process* and *to dispatch* are used (pp. 134-135). Thought to promote a violent image, the whips and sticks used to force animals into the slaughterhouse are now being referred to as *guides* by the industry (p. 135). When a whole group of animals is sent to slaughter and a new one is brought in to the factory, the industry conveniently refers to it as *depop-repop* (depopulation-repopulation) (p. 135). Sometimes, as Stibbe (2001) has noted, the exploits are completely disguised through jargon: “Perdigo’s Marau plant processes 4.95-pound broilers at line speeds of 136 bpm, running 16 hours per day” (p. 156). Here the chickens are referred to by their cooking method, and what is more, they become mathematical units, but *bpm* stands for “birds per minute”.

### 4.1.4 Euphemism

Closely linked with jargon, euphemisms serve to soften animal abuse. According to Jason Jones and Jean Stilwell Peccei (2004):

\(^6\) Induced or forced molting involves depriving the hens of food and water, and subjecting them to twenty-four hours of daylight over a period of few days, with the purpose of increasing their egg production (Singer, 2009, pp. 118-119).

\(^7\) People associate the word *neuter* with a professional anesthetized surgery, but in the livestock industry to neuter means to cut of testicles without anesthesia (Dunayer, 2001, p. 131).
A euphemism is a figure of speech which uses mild, inoffensive or vague words as a means of making something seem more positive than it might otherwise appear. [...] It is a device which can help to make what might actually be seen as questionable ideas or issues more palatable and ‘normal’ and is a potentially useful tool for politicians when engaging in what Orwell called the ‘defense of the indefensible’. (Jones et al, p. 48)

Dunayer has collected countless examples of animal-specific euphemisms, some of which, like leather and pork (instead of skin and pig flesh), have become so rooted in the language that most would not see them as such. Other euphemisms are more meditated: visitor guides at Sea World Florida have been instructed to say *acquired* instead of *captured*, and *pool* instead of *tank* (pp. 92-95); hunters use the words *manage* and *control* instead of *kill*, and claim to participate in the important task of *wildlife management* when they basically are *hunting for sport* (p. 52); again instead of *killing* animals hunters *bag*, *collect*, *secure*, *gather* and *harvest* them (p. 55); fishermen, instead of *torture* and *kill*, *play*, *exercise* or *battle* fish to exhaustion, and then *land* and *subdue* them (pp. 64-65); and conductors of animal research avoid the words *pain* and *suffering*, substituting them with weaker terms such as *discomfort* and *distress*. Interestingly, in all these examples, the agents are using words that minimise, even erase, the sufferers’ experience. Similarly, hunters and vivisectors deny their role in the sufferers’ experience by referring to themselves as *sportsmen* or *outdoorsmen*, and *biomedical researchers* or simply *scientists* (p. 104).

Meat eaters also use euphemisms to disguise what they are consuming. The word *meat* itself used to mean “food” in general, but during the 14th century the term underwent a process of semantic narrowing and came to mean “flesh used as food” (Online Etymology dictionary). Likewise, meat eaters do not eat pig, cow or sheep,
but *pork, beef* and *mutton*. These euphemisms allow for a cognitive distance between
the animals and the meat. According to Dunayer, “To increase goat flesh’s popularity,
in 1922 the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association proposed that ‘goat meat’ be
called chevon” (p. 138). Giving the flesh a respectable name makes the action of
consuming it seem less “brutal”. Evasion from direct naming of body parts is also
evident, but instead words like *bacon, chucks, and cutlets* are used. Often focus is
removed from the flesh by referring to manner of preparation instead, as with the
words *pepperoni, burger, steak* and *sausage* (p.139). Adams (2006) furthermore
points out that “We opt for less disquieting reference points not only by changing
names from animals to meat, but also by cooking, seasoning and covering the animals
with sauces, disguising their original nature” (p. 59). As Stibbe (2001) points out,
direct mention of what meat actually is can have shock value, but *The BBC* took
advantage of this during the BSE crisis when they reported “cattle were being fed
‘mashed up cows’” (p. 150). Avoiding direct mention of flesh or giving it
euphemisms conceals the victims involved and frees meat eaters from giving their
actions any moral consideration.

### 4.1.5 Metaphor

According to Jones and Peccei (2004), a metaphor is “a way of comparing two
different concepts”, more specifically a way of asserting that something is something
else (p. 45). In the late eighties, the zoo industry managed to come up with a metaphor
that has greatly benefited their public image, that is the *ark metaphor*. Since then,
zoos have been depicted as saviours of species. As Dunayer notes:

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8 All of which originated in the 13-14th centuries (Online Etymology Dictionary).
9 I.e. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly known as mad-cow disease.
10 Instead of the euphemism “ground beef”.
The ark metaphor implies that captive breeding eventually will enhance free-living populations. Few reintroduction projects involving captive-bred animals have helped to establish self-sustaining populations in nature – apparently only 16 of 145 such projects documented as of 1995. Even fewer have entailed any zoo involvement. [...] Zoos aren’t arks; they’re showboats. (pp. 84-85).

In a similar manner, hunters and the factory farming and research industry speak of animals as “metaphorical ‘crops’ and ‘machines’”. Instead of being given water, the animals are watered like plants, they are seen as meat while still alive, and they are literally perceived of as tools and stock (pp. 6-7). Stibbe (2001) notes how animals become metaphorical resources in all the animal product industries, where focus is placed on words such as damage instead of injury, as in “bird damage”; product instead of bodies, as in “product is 100 percent cut-up and deboned”; and batch instead of animals, as in “slaughter of the batch” (p. 155). He then adds, “Since inanimate resources cannot suffer, the discursive construction of animals as resources contributes to an ideology that disregards suffering” (p. 155). When it comes to animal exploitation, metaphors can be especially useful.

4.1.6 Semantic reversal

According to Dunayer “Semantic reversal pervades speciesist exploitation and killing” (p. 8). Semantic reversal is the process of using words in opposition to their meaning. Animal “shelters”, for instance, perform “euthanasia” on millions of healthy animals every year. How can they be termed shelters when their main purpose is to kill unwanted animals? Shelters are places that are supposed to protect you from danger. Similarly, the word euthanasia has lost its meaning when applied to animals. Euthanasia is derived from the Greek words eu and thanatos, and it literally means
“good death” (Encyclopedia of Animal Rights, 1998, p. 164). When applied to humans, its meaning is restricted to mercy killing, but when applied to animals the meaning becomes much broader, allowing for the killing of healthy animals, often merely for the sake of their owners’ convenience. How can death be good for the animal when it is perfectly healthy? In some instances it might be good for the owner, but never for the animal. When applied to animals, the term euthanasia obviously serves the interests of humans rather than animals and gives a false, glorified image of the action behind it.

Yet another example is the term welfare. When applied to humans, it means “the health and happiness of people”, but when used about animals it means “good care and living conditions” (Macmillian English Dictionary, 2002, p. 1626). Yet, how can it be termed welfare when most animals are being subjected to horrible living conditions and ultimately killed? As Dunayer notes, “Animals who are enslaved and murdered certainly lack well-being” (p. 134). It is termed animal welfare when people demand improvements in the living conditions of animals, when perhaps it would be much more appropriate to call it rights. Seeing as the end goal is always to kill the animal for human benefit, the term welfare never really applies to the animals, but rather serves human interests. When the same words are applied differently to humans and other animals it reflects the speciesist premise that animals naturally have fewer rights and deserve less consideration.

4.1.7 Oxymoron

An oxymoron is “an expression that contains words with opposite meanings” (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002, p. 1017). The expression shooting preserve is an oxymoron. It implies that you can both shoot and preserve animals at the same
time. According to Dunayer, “In the U.S., public-land ‘preserves’ permit hunting, and thousands of commercial ‘preserves’ offer a chance to kill tame birds or mammals for a fee” (pp. 53-54). She furthermore notes that the expression only makes sense when reversed: *preserve shooting* (p. 53). In addition, there is the oxymoronic hunting expression *unretrieved harvest*, but it refers to the animals that are left wounded. According to Dunayer, “Studies indicate that more than one-fourth of mourning doves and bobwhite quails shot by hunters go unretrieved, and more than one-third of ducks” (p. 47). Firstly, talking about animals as if they were plants disguises the fact that you are inflicting them with pain when you hunt them. Secondly, *unretrieved harvest* is an oxymoron since harvesting something does not include leaving it on the ground to rot (p. 56).

Meat eaters can now soothe their conscience by buying *certified humane meat* (see for example www.certifiedhumane.org). Surely *humane meat* is an oxymoron. The *Macmillan English Dictionary* defines *humane* as “caring about the quality of people’s or animal’s lives and trying to be kind to them” (2002, p. 701). Turning animals into meat can barely be considered kind. The oxymoronic label gives the false impression that the animal was treated kindly throughout its life, when of course at some point the kindness stopped and the slaughtering began. The label should perhaps rather read: *certified less cruel meat*.

### 4.1.8 Doublespeak

*Doublespeak* refers to “language used to deceive, usually through concealment or misrepresentation of truth” (Merriam Webster Online Dictionary). George Orwell explores the linguistic ploys of doublespeak in his novel, *1984*, on a totalitarian state that brainwashes its citizens. One of the slogans used by the state was “Freedom is
Slavery” and “Slavery is Freedom” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 75). As Dunayer points out, people in the zoo industry employ the same methods, but for them “Freedom is Captivity” and Captivity is Freedom” (p. 75). According to them, zoo animals enjoy freedom from enemies, or as the Denver Zoo’s director put it: “All animals are captives of their environment”; because nature can be harsh, ‘animals that are so-called ‘living free’ are not living free at all’” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 75). Some even go as far as saying that zoo animals have freedom from extinction (p. 75). Similarly, the factory farming industry would like people to believe that “Confinement is Freedom”. Producers label their chickens as “free roaming”, when it only means that they have not been raised in battery cages. The chickens, contrary to popular belief, usually do not enjoy freedom but are kept confined in enormous sheds in extremely crowded conditions, never being allowed to see daylight.

Hunters are fans of doublespeak, but with them statements like the following are not uncommon: “I elected to immortalize that animal” (by using its remains for decorative purposes); “shooting a doe allows her to complete her life cycle”; “I’m involved in bighorn conservation” (by shooting a California bighorn sheep); “humans are predators, as much as a mountain lion or a coyote” (pp. 54-61). All of this language is meant to show that hunters respect the animals that they kill, as well as disguise the fact that hunters kill animals for sport, and that they inflict pain and suffering on the animals. As Dunayer points out, such deceptive statements are “a necessary component of unjustifiable behaviour” (p. 55).

Vivisectors also make use of doublespeak. They deceptively talk about alternatives to animal research that include vivisection: “By definition, an alternative to something doesn’t include the thing itself. However, in vivisection doublespeak, ‘alternatives to animal research’ include harmful animal research that uses fewer
animals or causes less suffering than other cruel methods” (p.105). The vivisectors’ underlying claim is that vivisection is indispensable and cannot be excluded from research.

4.1.9 Derogation

Derogation is the “process in which a word can take on a second meaning and/or connotations which are negative or demeaning” (Jones et al, p. 219).

Sometimes animal metaphors can be positive, as in the cases of sport team names like Detroit Tigers and Chicago Bears, or car names such as Jaguar or Mustang (p. 165). Usually, however, when you call someone a specific animal, for example a pig, it is meant to have a derogatory effect. The pejorative effect rests on speciesism, but without it, being called a pig would not be considered so bad. Many adjectives and verbs also serve as derogations, for instance cocky and to parrot, and most similes project animals in a negative way: drunk as a skunk; cross as a bear (p.166).

Dunayer, however, makes a good point when she notes that “Our language transfers human viciousness and ‘brutality’ to other species”: “The ruthless, we say, ‘claw’ their way to the top; they’re vipers, rats, skunks, and sharks. Sexual offenders are ‘predators.’ The most violent criminals are ‘animals’” (pp. 3-4) Perhaps these derogations say more about the nature of humans than they do about the animals in question. For instance, ironically, the American Heritage Dictionary states that “‘brutal’ traits such as ‘unfeeling cruelty’ are ‘more characteristic of lower animals than of human beings’”, but then gives examples of human behaviour such as bull-baiting and cockfighting (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 40). Maybe the reason humans are so fond of belittling other species by means of derogation is because they like to feel superior, and they feel less guilty if the animals they are exploiting are made to
seem less worthy. As Stibbe (2001) points out “The closer the relation of dominance of a particular species by humans, the more negative the stereotypes contained in the idioms of mainstream discourse” (p. 150). In one of his cartoons, Ray Smith explores the effects of derogatory speech by showing two dogs in conversation: “That bitch that Rover took out last night was a real human, wasn’t she?” (as cited in Dunayer 2001, p. 157). This simple cartoon is very powerful because it shows us how it is to be on the other side of the linguistic axis of power.

4.1.10 Puns and wordplay

The media can often be found guilty of trivializing animals and their exploitation, suffering or even death. Newspaper headlines such as these are not uncommon: “The Buck Stops Here” and “The Story of BAM-bi” (about a buck that fatally collided with a car) (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 6); “How Did the Chickens Cross the Road? Well scrambled” (about a car crash that injured and killed thousands of chicken that were being transported to the slaughterhouse) (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 6); “Later, gator: Pets get dumped as they grow” (about people who rid themselves of exotic pets) (28 August 2010, The Detroit News). This conveys a deeply speciesist attitude since human suffering or death would never be mocked in such ways. The media is furthermore guilty of justifying wrongful treatment of animals, but a Chicago Tribune reporter wrote about the capture of two free-living belugas as if they willingly departed for the Aquarium: they “‘exchanged’ the ocean’s depths for an airplane’s heights and ‘took up residence’” in an aquarium (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 93). Our everyday language also contains speciesist wordplay. Fixed phrases such as run around like a chicken with its head cut off, have other fish
to fry, kill two birds with one stone and there’s more than one way to skin a cat, all serve to belittle the worth of animals’ lives (p. 167).

4.1.11 Categorisation and labels

Categorising and labelling animals as specific types of animals suggests that their positions as such are natural. Dunayer notes:

*Furbearer* tags a nonhuman person a potential pelt. *Circus animal* suggests some natural category containing hoop-jumping tigers and dancing bears, nonhumans of a ‘circus’ type. The verbal trick makes deprivation and coercion disappear. *Companion animal* reduces a dog, cat or other nonhuman to the role of companion. Minus that role, the term implies, such animal has no place; if they aren’t some human’s companion, or their companionship fails to please, they can be abandoned or killed. (p.8)

Similarly, the terms *food animal, game animal* and *lab animal* imply that these animals all have a natural purpose to serve human needs, or to be food, prey and research subjects respectively. Labels are used extensively in the food industry, but there animals are tagged as *veal calf, dairy cow, breeder pig, layer* or *broiler chicken* to name only a few. Dunayer points out the “false inevitability of categories like ‘poultry’, ‘food fish’ and ‘livestock’”, but if a hen, for example, is adopted from an egg factory and becomes someone’s pet she immediately looses the exploitive label ‘poultry’ (p. 146). In his book, *Meat: A Natural Symbol*, Nick Fiddes uses this newspaper ad, which caused much outcry, as an example of the artificiality of such categories: “Rabbits for sale: as pets, or for the freezer” (1993, p. 132). Apparently people have no problem with an animal belonging to one category, but as soon as you
place it into two categories at once, like “pet” and “food animal”, it becomes upsetting. Currently, people are hiding behind labels and feeding on lies. It is time to stop the act and face the truth.

Other animals, like raccoons or rats, receive the labels varmint, nuisance or pest, but all of these legitimise killing. As soon as an animal is labelled in this way it becomes justifiable to not only kill it, but also to do so by using horrible methods, such as poison and traps that cut off the animals legs. As Dunayer so bluntly puts it, these labels transform “speciesist genocide into a public service” (p. 57). These categories are also false, as the period of persecution of white tailed eagles in Iceland shows. Today, these birds are completely protected and revered as the kings of the sky, but up until 1914 they were labelled pests because they were considered a threat to domesticated animals such as lambs and eider ducks (Ólafsson, 2006, p. 218). The eagles nearly became extinct in Iceland in 1890, but today there are about sixty pairs that breed around the coastal area (Ólafsson, 2006, p. 218). Placing animals into categories such as these serves a political, not scientific, purpose. Such political propaganda can have serious consequences for whole species of animals. Considering some animals as trash and others as royalty, is yet another form of speciesism.

4.1.12 Personal names

According to Dunayer, “Exploiters guard against genuine relationships with those they exploit because empathy and exploitation are mutually exclusive” (p. 89). Leaving animals nameless helps to ignore their individuality and create emotional detachment. Consequently, animal exploiters, such as the food and animal research industries, opt to leave their victims anonymous, or, at best, refer to them by numbers or degrading names. Two pig farmers warn: “Resist the temptation to become too
attached. If you’re going to eat it, don’t give it a pet name. Try something like ‘Porky’ or ‘Chops’ or ‘Spareribs’ if the urge to name is too strong” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 141). Contemptuous names such as these are also used in the research industry: “At Biosearch, a Philadelphia product testing lab, technicians called a newly arrived dog Dead Meat. She was killed six days later” (p. 116). Furthermore, researchers resort to referring to their subjects by their species, as in “Cut it out rabbit” or “Oh, have some axonal [nerve-fiber] damage, monkey” (p. 116).

Zoos are a good example of how powerful personal names can be in evoking empathy for their bearers. According to a marketing director at Brookfield Zoo in Illinois, “Personal names boost Animal Adoption donations, increase public interest, and please the press” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 89). For instance, Icelandic children were devastated when the bull Guttormur, one of many bovines kept at the Reykjavik Zoo and Family Park, died in 2005 (16 September 2005, mbl.is). Guttormur, probably the only Icelandic bovine that has been awarded a funeral, now rests in a special pet cemetery. If it had not been for his name, no one would have cared about his death. This shows the effects language can have on us. A simple linguistic procedure, such as naming, can completely change the way we think about another being.

4.2 Exerting Authority Over Animals: Grammatical Structure

The term grammar is usually used to talk about a linguistic system that consists of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Dobrovolsky, Katamba & O’Grady, 1997, p. 9). Semantics have already been covered above, but this section will mainly focus on aspects of morphology, the study of word formations, and syntax, the study of sentence formations. According to William
O’Grady, Michael Dobrovolsky and Francis Katamba (1997), “the grammatical knowledge needed to use and understand language is acquired without the benefit of instruction and is for the most part subconscious” (p. 9). People therefore generally do not think about grammar as they are speaking, but make their grammatical choices automatically. Sometimes, as for instance in the cases of political spin-doctoring or advertising, grammar can be exploited for powerful rhetorical effect. When it comes to linguistic power, grammatical structure, whether used consciously or subconsciously, can be just as harmful to animals as lexical semantics.

4.2.1 Pronouns

Conventional pronoun use reduces animals to inanimate things and ignores their gender and status as individuals. Humans continue to refer to animals as insentient its even though it is a biological fact that they are all sentient males (he), females (she) or hermaphrodites (he/she) (p. 150). What purpose does it serve in this Washington post headline to a story on a rhino who was killed after escaping from a zoo: “It was believed to be pregnant”? (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 150). To Dunayer the answer is obvious: “Applied to any individual, it signals and helps maintain emotional distance and feelings of superiority” (p. 149). What is more, it seems inanimate objects are sometimes valued more than animate animals. When desiring to display affection or respect for a certain object, people sometimes refer to them as he or she, as in “She’s a real beauty” when talking about someone’s car. This shows that the use of it really does render animals as mere objects, while the use of he or she would depict them as living beings worthy of consideration and respect.

For the purpose of reducing sympathy towards vivisected animals, the Journal of Experimental Medicine has the following editorial guidelines: “Never use ‘he,’
‘she,’ ‘his,’ or ‘hers’ in reference to an animal. Use ‘it,’ ‘its.’” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 152). It is generally accepted to speak of a beloved pet as a *he* or a *she*, but when referring to exploited animals it becomes especially beneficial to render them as insentient “its”. According to Stibbe (2001), “The common way of referring to animals as it rather than him or her objectifies them. Objects can be *bought, sold,* and *owned,* a lexical set used routinely in everyday conversation when talking about animals. This reveals the common sense assumption that animals are property” (p. 151).

The same pronoun politics are found in the use of *that* or *which* instead of *who*. As Dunayer points out, “The *who/that* divide belongs between beings (sentient) and things (insentient), not between humans and all other animals” (p.153). All the same, people generally use *that* or *which* when referring to animals. A standard writing manual advises “Rover, who leaped the fence” and “The dog, which leaped the fence” (p. 154). Again it seems that an animal only deserves consideration as a sentient beings as long as it matters to a human. It is also interesting to note that hunters and fishermen often take the *who/that* divide one step further and refer to their catches as *what*, as in “Look what I’ve caught” (p. 155). Saying “Look who I’ve caught” would probably evoke too much sympathy for the animal.

Lastly, standard language use reserves -*one* and -*body* for humans only while animals continue to be classified as -*thing*. Hunters and fishermen ask “Catch anything?” not “Catch anyone?” (p. 155). Situated at the basic language level, this sort of political pronoun use may be the root to our speciesist language practices that foster the abuse of animals.
4.2.2 Count vs. mass nouns

When speaking about a group of animals, people often refer to them as one collective thing by using mass or collective nouns. This habit of portraying multiple animals as one entity negates their individuality. As Dunayer points out “Each being is physically and mentally unique” but we choose to ignore this through our language in order to achieve emotional detachment and superiority (p. 6).

Hunters achieve emotional detachment by applying mass nouns to the animals they kill. They talk about how much they shoot, rather than how many, and the amount rather than the number (p. 59). They are also fond of collective nouns such as “wildlife, game, quarry, and prey” and expressions such as “head of cattle, pieces of game” (p. 59; p. 6). Stibbe (2001) notes how “When animals die, they change, in a way that humans do not, from objects to substance, count nouns to mass nouns. It is possible to say some chicken, some lamb, or some chicken leg, but some human and some human leg are ungrammatical” (p. 151). According to him, “Using mass nouns instead of count nouns removes the individuality of the animals, with the ideological assumption that each animal is just a replaceable representative of a category” (p. 151). The overall effect is that individuals do not matter.

4.2.3 Active vs. passive

Animals are also portrayed as mindless, non-individuated beings through the use of passive, rather than active, language. Passive language is achieved through the use of qualifiers like “probably and appeared, and the avoidance of words that imply intentional action, and feeling, such as active verbs like contemplate and study and active nouns such as love and friendship. Those who do not follow this convention are considered guilty of anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism, according to Dunayer:
refers to the false attribution of uniquely human characteristics. It isn’t anthropomorphic to believe that owls, iguanas and orangutans have thoughts, feelings and personalities. It is anthropomorphic to believe that they should wear shoes, would benefit from a college education, or must have human thoughts, feelings and personalities or none at all. (pp. 22-23)

Denying animals all feelings and thoughts provides the basis for their exploitation. Often it can be difficult to deny them completely and then animals’ actions are described by resorting to the phrase shows signs of, as in shows signs of fear, rage or joy. This implies that animals are not capable of having those feelings, they only appear to have them. Citing the qualified language of Maurice Burton, Dunayer notes how animals are also denied compassion: “it looked as if they were standing back out of compassion” (about a group of chaffinches and sparrows that allowed a lame bird space to eat) (p. 42). Dunayer then adds, “When we deny that other animals show compassion, it’s easier not to show it ourselves. The question is not whether nonhumans can be altruistic, but the extent to which humans can” (p. 43). Loren Eiseley’s prose contrasts the sentience and emotional life of birds to the empty life of machines: a “machine does not bleed, ache, hang for hours in the empty sky in the torment of hope to learn the fate of another machine, nor does it cry out with joy nor dance in the air with the fierce passion of a bird” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, pp. 34-35). Descriptions like these, of animals performing purposeful and emotional actions, are rare, and the reason is obvious: animal exploitation.

4.2.4 Subject position

Reflecting the bias that humans are more important than other animals, standard sentence structure usually places humans before animals: John and his dog
Rover; Humans and animals (p. 5). As Dunayer notes, this is also the standard practice when it comes to the sexes: his and her; boys and girls; men and women (p. 5). Likewise, subject position is sometimes used to place more importance on men rather than women, as in the following example taken from an article in The Sun: “A terrified 19-stone husband was forced to lie next to his wife as two men raped her yesterday” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 5). Dunayer analyses the sentence as follows:

Instead of the raped woman, her spouse gets first mention, subject position, and the description “terrified”. Relegated to “his wife,” the primary victim is buried midsentence inside a prepositional phrase (“next to his wife”) and dependent clause (“as two men raped her yesterday”). (p. 5)

The woman’s suffering, which is obviously greater than her husbands’, disappears in this sentence. Animals are also routinely buried beneath human-centred syntax in this way. When countless animals die in a fire for example, often, according to the media it is not the animals who suffer, but the owners who suffer loss. Animals are rarely subjects of sentences, but may instead be depicted through language that focuses on humans’ perceptions of the animals: “a low intermittent whimper was heard… a solitary springbok was seen approaching” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 41). If the springbok was the subject of the sentence it would give more weight to the animal: “the springbok gave out a low intermittent whimper and approached us”.

Dunayer notes how animal research reports avoid placing their research animals in the subject position: “Injection of [bacteria] was uniformly lethal in saline-treated control animals within 24 hours” (p. 118). Here it is the injection that is most important, not the dead animals. Animal researchers not only avoid placing the
animals they are harming in subject position, but also resort to focusing instead on body parts, rather than individuals: “A 30-second full-thickness scald burn over 20% total body surface area was inflicted” (p. 118). Saying “Each rat was scalded over 20 percent of his body” evokes too much sympathy (p. 118). Often reference to location also replaces the animals, as in the fish farming industry where “insiders speak of feeding, vaccinating, and dosing a ‘pond’” and where “Polluted ‘sites,’ not caged salmons, ‘suffer oxygen stress’” (p. 140). Some exploiters even go as far as removing the animal from the sentence altogether, leaving it without a subject:

When we read that cocaine poisoning “produced episodes of wild running and ataxia,” “convulsions generally occurred within 90 sec of injection,” and “death generally occurred within the first 15 min following the injection,” it is poisoned mice who ran about wildly, collapsed, suffered convulsions, and died. (p. 118)

Subject removal is also common in the food industry but this statement by the company North and Bell intentionally leaves out any mention of birds: “Feed consumption is depressed following trimming [debeaking] and body weight is often reduced” (as cited in Dunayer, 2001, p. 126). Stibbe (2001) uses the following example to show how agency is often deliberately hidden: “Catcher fatigue, absenteeism and turnover can effect broken bones and bruises that reduce processing yields” (p. 155). He analyses the sentence as follows:

This is accomplished through the nominalizations broken bones (X breaks Y’s bone) and bruises (X bruises Y), which allow the patient, Y, to be deleted. The agent, X, in this case the “catcher,” is also deleted, appearing only indirectly as a modifier in the noun phrase “catcher fatigue,” which forms part of the
agent of the verb “effect” rather than “break.” This distances deliberate human action from animal injuries. In addition, the results of the injuries are not mentioned in terms of pain or suffering, but in terms of “yields.”

While it stays syntactically hidden in this way, the suffering of animals will be allowed to continue.

4.2.5 Possessive

For quite some time, humans have seen the animal kingdom as something that they possess. In Iceland, for instance, one of the main arguments of those who support whaling is: “The whales are eating all our fish”. Our superiority complex has become so great that most people would not see anything wrong with this argument. It has become natural to us to speak of animals in possessive terms, as if we owned their very being. Similarly, “The common phrase our wildlife conveys the proprietary attitude that prevails among humans” (Dunayer, 2001, p. 53).

Dunayer points out how using a non-relational noun with the possessive, as in my woman, might be sexist, while using a relational one is not, as in my spouse (p. 7). They same can be said of animals, but saying my dog equates a dog to an inanimate thing, like an iPod, while adding a relational noun, such as my dog friend/companion, acknowledges the dog as an animate being (p. 7). During the time of slavery, slaveholders referred to their slaves as “Our negros”, reducing their status to mere things that can be owned and exploited. The same is being done today in all fields of animal exploitation, but the food and research industry speaks of “our animals”. Hunters, likewise, reveal a sense of entitlement to animals when they speak of predators “killing their game” or “taking their trophy”, or when they ask each other “Did you get your buck” (p. 53). Dunayer wonders what the exploiters could say if
they were pressed to “substitute a relational noun and acknowledge their stance toward nonhuman animals”? Her answer is, “Our victims.” (p. 7). Finally, Adams points out that meat eaters tend to view their victims as objects, not living beings: “Since objects are possessions they cannot have possessions: thus we say ‘leg of lamb’ not a ‘lamb’s leg,’ ‘chicken wings’ not a ‘chicken’s wings’ (2006, p. 59).

4.3 Attitude Change

The verbal vivisection in the above two sections is meant to reveal how people often use language, whether reflectively or not, against animals. It is clear from the examples that people achieve emotional distance from animals by use of language, which in turn reinforces and maintains speciesist beliefs. In this way, unanalysed language is an obstacle to progress in the field of animal rights. Our attitudes toward and treatment of animals is unlikely to change while we continue to use this sort of evasive and deceptive language. By changing our language habits and using more transparent language we can influence our thoughts and actions. Unfortunately, specific proposals for such a program go beyond the limitations of this essay. Instead a list of suggestions to alternative language, taken from Joan Dunayer’s Style Guidelines and Thesaurus (2001, pp. 179-201) has been placed in the appendix. It is the author’s hope that readers will take time to look through it and at least consider these usage suggestions the next time they speak directly or indirectly about animals. Reflecting on the language we use gives us an important opportunity to examine our thoughts about other animals.
5. CONCLUSION

The human exploitation and abuse of animals, throughout the centuries and as it exists today, has largely been made possible through deceptive and evasive use of language. Without the linguistic means they need to defend themselves, animals are currently situated at the deepest level of oppression. Starting for real with the introduction of Christianity, animal exploitation in the Western world seems to have culminated over the last century with the arrival of behavioural research, factory farming and other extreme exploitive practices. In recent decades, people have started to see through the deceptive discourse surrounding animal exploitation and have begun the battle for animals’ rights. Animals are not the only group to fall victims to deceptive discourses, but throughout history vulnerable social groups, such as women, have been dominated through language. However, animal rights threaten longstanding habits and beliefs, such as meat eating and vivisection, and will therefore continue to be ridiculed for some time. Gaining rights for animals is an uphill battle, which can only be won if people stop wearing the linguistic mask, acknowledge their relation to the animals and face their actions toward them. When we distance ourselves from the animals we are distancing ourselves from the truth. Let us not deny it, we are the victimisers and we seek justification through various linguistic ploys. At present, linguistic devices such as the use of euphemisms, jargon, derogation, pronouns, and passive and possessive language, to name only a few, promote emotional distance from animals and sustain the unjust treatment of animals. The way we speak about animals reflects the way we think about them and treat them. By changing our language habits, we can influence the way we think and act. It is not enough to claim abstract respect for animals; we must embody that respect in our everyday language and daily lives.
REFERENCES


Humane Farm Animal Care (Certified Humane).

Retrieved from www.certifiedhumane.org


APPENDIX

The following examples are taken from Dunayer’s *Style Guidelines: Countering Speciesism* and *Thesaurus: Alternatives to Speciesist Terms* (2001, pp. 179-201).

**Style Guidelines: Countering Speciesism**

**SENTENCE STRUCTURE**

*USE...*

syntax that makes nonhuman animals the grammatical subject, especially if they’re the primary actors or victims.

word order that frequently places nonhumans before humans (*nonhuman and human animals*)

*AVOID...*

syntax that buries nonhuman animals inside a list, dependent clause, or prepositional phrase.

syntax that equates nonhuman beings with inanimate things (The tornado *destroyed a barn and ten cows*).

**WORD CHOICES**

*USE...*

animals to include all creatures (human and nonhuman) with a nervous system

the same vocabulary for nonhumans and humans (pigs and humans *eat* rather than *feed*; the bodies of dead sheep or humans are *corpses*, not *carcasses* etc.)

*he* for a male animal, *she* for a female animal, and *she/he* or *he/she* for a hermaphrodite

*who* (not *that, which, or what*) for any sentient being

*anybody/anyone, everybody/everyone, nobody/no one, and somebody/someone* (not *anything, everything, nothing, or something*) for any sentient being

relational references to nonhuman animals after possessive pronouns (*my cat companion, not my cat; our canary friends, not our canaries*)

plural forms of words for individual animals in preference to collective nouns (*the chickens instead of the flock; free-living nonhumans instead of wildlife*)
verbs that imply nonhuman emotion and intention (*romped* instead of *leaped about*; *fled* instead of *ran*)

words that directly attribute thought and feeling to nonhuman animals (*understand*; *joy*)

number (not amount) references to living animals (*how many geese*, not *how much geese*)

everyday language free of jargon (*breaking the neck*, not *cervical dislocation*)

moralistic language (*murder*, *cruelty*, *speciesism*), not morally detached language such as that of economics, experimentation, or recreation

wording that keeps nonhuman animals in view (*Many pigs died*, not *Mortality was high*; *The trapped fox struggled*, not *Struggling occurred*)

**AVOID**...

expressions that elevate humans above other animals (*human kindness*; *the rational species*; *the sanctity of human life*)

human-nonhuman comparisons that patronize nonhumans (*almost human*; Chimpanzees have many *human characteristics*)

hierarchical references to animals (*lower animals*; *subhuman*; *inferior*)

pejorative nonhuman-animal metaphors and similes (*bitch*; *to parrot*; *eat like a pig*)

the imprecise, demeaning terms *beast*, *brute*, and *dumb animal*

category labels that vilify nonhumans (*vermin*; *pests*; *trash fish*)

overqualified reference to nonhuman thought and feeling (*seemed to recognize*; *as if she felt pain*; *This behavior might indicate loneliness*)

reference to living animals as if they were remains (*raise beef*; *trophy hunter*)

terms that equate nonhuman animals with insentient things (*the oyster crop*; reference to mice as *research tools*)

commodity references to nonhuman animals (*livestock*; *surplus* dogs and cats; reference to male chicks as egg-industry *byproducts*)

terms that negate any animal’s uniqueness (*replacement lambs*; *standardized dogs*; reference to nonhumans as *renewable resources*)

expressions that trivialize violence toward nonhuman animals (*kill two birds with one stone*; *have other fish to fry*)

euphemisms (*animal agriculture*, *biomedical research*, *leather*, *sausage*)
terms that naturalize the unnatural (*habitat* for a cage; *wildlife center* for a zoo)

expressions that imply nonhuman victimization is natural and acceptable (*work like a horse; human guinea pig; treated us like animals*)

wording that portrays nonhuman as willing victims (monkeys who *participate* in experiments and *give their lives*)

*over-*terms that implicitly sanction less-rampant killing and less extreme coercion (*overhunt; overfish; overwork a horse*)

language that depicts choice as a necessity (*necessary evil* in reference to vivisection)

punning or other wordplay that invites people to smirk at atrocities

**Thesaurus: Alternatives to Speciesist Terms**

Dunayer’s thesaurus is quite extensive. Only a few examples, which are relevant to the analysis in chapter four, will be given here. Please refer to Dunayer’s book for the rest of the entries.

**TERMS TO AVOID**

**ALTERNATIVES**

**Nonhuman/Human Terms**

animal instinct

instinct

animals (excluding humans)
nonhuman animals, other animals, nonhumans, nonhuman beings/persons

beast, brute

nonhuman animal

bestial/brutal

barbaric, depraved/cruel, violent, harsh

calf, foal, whelp (etc.) v.
give birth

even (as in “Even insects feel”)
also, too, including, as well (as in “Insects, too, feel”)

human kindness

kind, compassionate
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<th>TERMS TO AVOID</th>
<th>ALTERNATIVES</th>
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<tr>
<td>inhumane</td>
<td>cruel</td>
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**Hunting Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bag, collect, cull, harvest, remove (etc.)</th>
<th>kill, murder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>game, game animals, trophy animals</td>
<td>sport-hunted animals, targeted nonhumans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>game preserve, game refuge, shooting preserve; wildlife refuge (that allows hunting)</td>
<td>hunting area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vivisection Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>donor animal, experimental animal, laboratory animal, research animal, test animal</th>
<th>vivisected animal, animal used in vivisection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>euthanize, put down, sacrifice (etc.)</td>
<td>kill, murder</td>
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**Food-Industry Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>abattoir; meat plant, packing plant, processing plant (in reference to a killing facility)</th>
<th>slaughterhouse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agricultural animal, farm animal, farmed animal, food animal</td>
<td>enslaved nonhuman, food-industry captive, animal enslaved for food, animal exploited for food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bacon, ham, pork (etc.)</td>
<td>pig flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef, hamburger, steak (etc.)</td>
<td>cow flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef producer, dairy farmer, egg producer (etc.)</td>
<td>cattle enslaver, cow enslaver, hen enslaver (etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cull v.</td>
<td>kill, murder, send to slaughter, sell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farm (with enslaved nonhumans), ranch</td>
<td>confinement facility, enslavement facility, enslavement operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERMS TO AVOID</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Terms of Speciesist Abuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animal welfare, humane treatment (in reference to nonhuman exploitation)</td>
<td>exploitation, abuse, less-cruel treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bullfight</td>
<td>bull torture, bull murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hide <em>n./leather</em></td>
<td>skin/cow skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pest control</td>
<td>murdering nonhumans, extermination, nonhuman genocide, mass murder of nonhumans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>renewable, surplus (in reference to nonhuman animals)</td>
<td>viewed as disposable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tame <em>v.</em> (a nonhuman animal)</td>
<td>subjugate, oppress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wildlife conservation, wildlife management</td>
<td>regulated killing of nonhumans, restricted killing of nonhumans, manipulating nonhuman populations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>