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ANALYSIS OF A TELEVISION EPISODE ON THE INTELLIGENCE OF PETS

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Abstract: This article uses ecolinguistics to analyze a 30-minute episode of a television documentary produced for 2022 presentation on Netflix, part of a four-episode series titled *The Hidden Lives of Pets*. The eight-segment episode displayed and explained various nonhuman animals' emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence. The animals included two species of dogs, three species of birds, one rabbit, and one reptile. The research questions were: (a) what types of intelligence would be highlighted; (b) how would their intelligence be validated; (c) would non-speciesist language be used when referring to the nonhuman animals; and (d) would any reference be made to the intelligence of nonhuman animals generally and to the implications of their intelligence for the ways human animals should treat them. The episode highlighted the importance of a conducive environment for the animals to develop their intelligence. The intelligence of these nonhuman animals was discussed in light of the growing recognition among humans of the intelligence of other animals and what this might mean for human behavior. Related to this, it was found that most humans in the episode used pronouns, such as *she* and *he*, that recognized other animals as sentient. As to Stibbe's (2021) system for ecolinguistic analysis, three categories were found to be of particular relevance: (1) erasure, as farmed animals and other non-pets were not included, nor was the fact that the environment in which farmed animals are forced to live is very unconducive for developing or displaying intelligence; (2) conviction, as the documentary's producers used video tools, as well as testimony from laypeople and scientists to buttress their claims of the pets' intelligence; and (3) ideologies, as viewers might interpret the documentary's story to mean that because the nonhuman animals viewed in the eight segments have demonstrated intelligence, they can ably provide humans with companionship and entertainment – the key purposes of pets - therefore, they have the right to exist.

Keywords: Intelligence of nonhuman animals; Documentaries; Ecolinguistics; Erasure; Ideology; Pronouns; Farmed animals.

Resumo: Este artigo utiliza a ecolinguística para analisar um episódio de 30 minutos de um documentário televisivo produzido para apresentação em 2022 na Netflix, parte de uma série de quatro episódios intitulada *The Hidden Lives of Pets*. O episódio de oito segmentos exibiu e explicou a inteligência emocional, social e cognitiva de vários animais não humanos. Os animais incluíam duas espécies de cães, três espécies de pássaros, um coelho e um réptil. As questões de pesquisa foram: (a) que tipos de inteligência seriam destacados; (b) como sua inteligência seria validada; (c) a linguagem não especista seria usada ao se referir aos animais não humanos; e (d) qualquer referência seria feita à inteligência de animais não humanos em geral e às implicações de sua inteligência para as maneiras como os animais humanos deveriam tratá-los. O episódio destacou a importância de um ambiente propício para que os animais desenvolvam sua inteligência. A inteligência desses animais não humanos foi discutida à luz do crescente reconhecimento da inteligência de outros animais entre os humanos e o que isso pode significar para o comportamento humano. Relacionado a isso, descobriu-se que a maioria dos humanos no episódio usava pronomes, como *ela* e *ele*, que reconheciam outros animais como sencientes. No que tane ao sistema de Stibbe (2021) para análise ecolinguística, três categorias foram consideradas de particular relevância: (1) apagamento, uma vez que animais de criação e outros não animais de estimação não foram incluídos, nem o fato de que o ambiente em que os animais de criação são forçados a viver é muito prejudicial para o desenvolvimento ou exibição de inteligência; (2) condenação, pois os produtores do documentário usaram ferramentas de vídeo, bem como depoimentos de leigos e cientistas para reforçar suas alegações sobre a inteligência dos animais de estimação; e (3) ideologias, como os telespectadores podem interpretar a história do documentário como significando que, como os animais não humanos vistos nos oito segmentos demonstraram inteligência, eles podem muito bem fornecer companhia e entretenimento aos humanos – os principais propósitos dos animais de estimação – portanto, eles têm o direito de existir.

Palavras-chave: Inteligência de animais não humanos; Documentários; Ecolinguística; Apagamento; Pronomes; Animais de estimação.

1. Introduction

Humans have long shared the Earth with other animals, but the place of humans among the other animals has greatly changed, such that some scientists have labeled the current geological era the Anthropocene, due to humans' (anthro) dominance. Today, hundreds of millions of nonhuman animals live as pets of humans. This article examines a 30-minute episode of a 2022 television documentary about pets. The focus of the episode in question is these nonhuman animals' intelligence. The article begins by reviewing the coverage of nonhuman animals in various forms of media, along with a discussion of types of intelligence. Next, one system for analyzing texts that deal with ecological issues is presented. Then, the eight segments of the documentary's intelligence episode, which features various nonhuman animals and their human companions, are summarized. This summary provides the background for analysis of the episode as to the range of nonhuman animals featured, the uses of pronouns when referring to the nonhumans, and relevant categories of ecolinguistic analysis (Stibbe, 2021). These categories are erasure, i.e., why are only pets, not farmed animals or others shown as being intelligent; conviction, i.e., how the documentary seeks to convince viewers that the pets are indeed intelligent; and ideology, i.e., whether believing in the intelligence of pets means believing that all nonhuman animals have the right to live or only those who meet humans' needs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pets

Pets, also known as companion animals, can be defined as nonhuman animals whom humans keep principally for companionship and entertainment, not for work, food, or research. Dogs and cats appear to be the two most common pets. According to one estimate (BEDFORD, 2020), as of 2018, humans had 470 million pet dogs and 370 million pet cats. Other animals used as pets include rabbits, hamsters, mice, parrots, turtles, and goldfishes.

Pets have appeared on many television shows, including shows in which humans care for sick or injured pets, e.g., Animal Hospital on BBC One or the Australian version on the Nine Network. Similar shows featuring practitioners of veterinary medicine include Dr Oakley Yukon Vet, on NatGeoWild and Disney Plus; The Incredible Dr Pol, on NatGeoWild and Disney Plus; The Vet Life, on Animal Planet and Amazon Prime; and Hanging with the Hendersons on Animal Planet and Amazon Prime. On these shows, the humans are the heroes, applying their skills, technology, and compassion to save pets and other animals, e.g., in one episode of Hanging with the Hendersons, a veterinarian, Dr Ross Henderson, sings to a golden retriever before performing surgery on the dog.

Jackson-Schebetta (2009) analyzed one of the most popular television pet shows, The Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan, first aired in 2004 on the National Geographic Channel. On the show, Millan helped people deal with problematic dogs, training the dogs to do what other humans wanted them to do. According to Jackson-Schebetta, the show promotes a "dominance paradigm through which the non-human animals are presented as commodities that conform to the human animal's desires" (p. 107). According to this paradigm, the dogs on that show existed to serve their human masters and were happier once they played that service role.

2.2 Pets and Other Nonhuman Animals in the Media

The use of nonhuman animals in the media provides a wide range of areas for study, with implications both for humans' relationships with these various other animals, as well as for humans' understanding of themselves (LERNER; KALOF, 1999), e.g., comparing how nonhuman animals are portrayed with the portrayal of less powerful segments of human society, including females and minorities. Types of media which present nonhuman animals include advertising, feature films, fictional books, documentaries, television comedies, social media, cartoons, and newspapers. The present article examines the portrayal of nonhuman domesticated animals in a television documentary.

Given the media presence of nonhuman animals, Mills (2017) argued that any media analysis must include the portrayal of nonhuman animals. His 2017 book examines how television depicts such areas of nonhuman-human interaction as zoos, pets, and meat consumption. Mills (2010 asked whether nonhuman animals used in wildlife documentaries were accorded the right to privacy, especially as improvements in human technology was making it ever easier to see wherever humans wanted irrespective of other animals' wishes. Curtin (2016) observed that documentaries on wild animals played a role in promoting tourism to the areas where the animals live.

Humans' fellow animals frequently appear in animated form, often in productions designed for children, going back to the days of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and their numerous fictional friends (MEEUSEN, 2019). Indeed, animals have long been prominent in children's literature, and the roles played by these animals have long been a matter of scholarly interest (NIKOLAJEVA, 2016), with animals often seen to be representing humans in one form or another, although such anthropomorphism is not animals' sole media role.

Different animal species receive different portrayals in the media, e.g., Korimboccus (2021) noted that while legislation was tabled in the parliament of the United Kingdom to ban the sale of dog meat, no such legislation was brought forth for the protection of chickens or cows. Bastian and Loughnan (2017) termed this the Meat Paradox. Consistent with this paradox, media portrayals of cute dogs are far more common than are such depictions of cute chickens or cows. However, characterizations by species are inconsistent, e.g., while rodents are often villainized, other times, positive attributes are assigned to them. For instance, the Hindu god Ganesh is sometimes depicted riding a rat, and in the Chinese zodiac, people born in the year of the rat are thought to be curious, imaginative, and resourceful.

2.3 The Intelligence of Nonhuman Animals

Discussions of the depictions of nonhuman animals must include questions about the accuracy of those depictions, especially for documentaries, as they lay claim to being factual. Central in the case of the documentary being analyzed in the present article are questions about the sentience (NG, 2022) of these animals. Do they possess intelligence and emotions? Can they feel pain? According to Parker (2010), the 17th century philosopher Descartes saw nonhuman animals as similar to machines, totally lacking in intelligence and unable to feel pain or anxiety. Of course, a great deal of research has taken place since then. For example, research with a range of nonhuman animals has supported claims of the sentience of cows (MARINO; ALLEN, 2018), sheep (MARINO; MERSKIN, 2019), birds (AKERMAN, 2017), fishes (BALCOMBE, 2016), and even flies (BALCOMBE, 2021). Based on such studies by others and his own research on primates, de Waal (2016) asked, in the title of a book: "Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?"

Not only can beings be classified according to whether or not they are seen as possessing intelligence, but greater understand can be added by classifying intelligence into different categories. For instance, Gardner (2006), referring specifically to humans, posited eight intelligences: bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, naturalist, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Boyatzis et al. (2012) discussed emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence, and Marino (2017) applied these categories to chickens.

The research cited above, as well as the advocacy of Goodall and others (e.g., GOODALL; BECKOFF, 2013) may have been one factor leading to a slight trend in some societies toward greater protection of animal welfare as seen in greater concern for abandoned pets (BRADLEY; RAJENDRAN, 2021), laws affording some protection for pets (TANG, 2021), protections for animals raised to provide food for humans ("Pig farrowing crates", 2022), and some human rights extended to great apes (ORTOLANI, 2018). Another trend that can benefit animals is the use of technology to replace nonhuman animals in research (AERTS et al., 2022) and in the food chain (Good Food Institute, 2022).

Dunayer (2001) accused humans of speciesism (discrimination based on one's species) in the words we use, at least in the case of English. Goodall, a primatologist and a long-time advocate for nonhuman animals, began her research career with chimpanzees in 1960 in Tanzania (GOODALL, 1990). When submitting her first research report to be considered for publication, she took two unorthodox steps: she gave her participants names, whereas standard practice was to use numbers; and she used the relative pronoun *who* to refer to the chimps, whereas standard practice was to use *which* or *that*. In other words about 300 years after Descartes, some attitudes still were little changed in the academic hierarchy. Indeed, now approximately 60 years after Goodall butted heads with journal editors, some style guides, such as the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), advise that the use of *who* be restricted to human animals (CHAU; JACOBS, 2021). Another language issue is whether to use *she, he,* or *it* with nonhuman animals when their sex is known (DUNAYER, 2001; MERSKIN, 2022).

2.4 Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics analyses visual and word texts by humans to understand how those texts influence and are influenced by humans' interactions with other species and the physical environment, with the goal of enhancing those interactions (International Ecolinguistics Association, n.d.). An increasingly popular tool in ecolinguistics is the book *Ecolinguistics: Ecology, Language and the Stories We Live By* (Stibbe, 2021). Stibbe provided eight categories for use in ecolinguistic investigations. Table 1 presents each category as well as a brief definition and example of the category.

Table 1 – Nine categories for ecolinguistic analysis

Stibbe's Categories	Definition of the Category	Example of Category
Ideologies	Stories about how the world was, is, will, or should be, which are shared by members of particular groups in society.	Humans have the right to dominate the Earth's other species.
Framings	Using stories from one area of life as frames to understand other areas of life.	Instead of treating the climate crisis as an environmental issue, to be dealt with by environment and energy departments alone, we need to reframe it as the overwhelming threat to national and global security which it is (Caroline Lucas, UK Green Party).
Metaphors	Stories that describe something as if it were something else.	Defusing the Global Warming time bomb.
Evaluations	Stories in people's minds about whether an area of life or a group	What is more important: getting food to the hundreds of millions of people

	of people or other species are good or bad, valuable or of little value	suffering malnutrition or maintaining market mechanisms.
Identities	Stories in people's minds about what it means to be a particular kind of person, including appearance, character, behavior, and values.	Real men eat large quantities of meat, drive big cars, vacation in far-away destinations, and focus on their upward mobility.
Convictions	Stories in people's minds about whether a particular description is true, certain, uncertain or false.	The notion of anthropogenic climate change is a fraud - the idea that the planet is getting warmer and that human activity is somehow responsible is a pseudo-scientific fraud, it's a big lie, it's a monstrosity (Webster Tarpley in the film The Obama Deception).
Salience	Stories in people's minds that areas of life are important or worthy of attention.	Putting something or someone on the front page of a newspaper, in a story with a big headline.
Erasure	Stories in people's minds that something/someone is unimportant or unworthy of consideration	When talking about recipes for dishes made with chicken flesh, not mentioning the 40 billion chickens slaughtered every year or that most of them live about six weeks before being slaughtered.
Narratives	Stories that trace the origins	A story about the origins of the solar system or of life on Earth.

3 Methodology

The present study analyzes one episode of a television documentary series, *The Hidden Lives of Pets*, first shown on Netflix in 2022, and executive produced by Lucinda Axelsson for Oxford Scientific Films. The series, as its title implies, intends to present humans with previously unknown information about pets. The one episode analyzed here focused on pets' intelligence. The three other episodes highlighted examples of particular pets' outstanding abilities in communication and athletics, as well as some pets' "super senses." Each of the four episodes lasts approximately 30 minutes. One of the researchers watches Netflix, and the title of the episode about companion animals' intelligence caught his attention, because he volunteers with organizations that campaign for humans to move away from using other animals for food, and one of the arguments for moving away from slaughtered foods towards alternative foods is that the animals whom humans use for food are intelligent beings, with emotions and social ties. Similarly, in the academic space, this researcher has been part of research teams investigating how language might both reflect as well as reinforce patterns in humans' interaction with other animals. For instance, one area of language

investigated was the use of the relative pronoun *who* rather than *that* or *which* when referring to nonhuman animals (GILKIN; JACOBS, 2006; DILLON et al., in review). For the current study, the researchers reached out to Axelsson and a colleague to tell them about the proposed research's purpose and to ask for a transcript of the episode, but at the time of the writing of this report, no reply has been received.

Thus, the researchers used only one data collection procedure: repeatedly watching that one episode, searching for salient points, organizing the points, and checking for accuracy, as suggested in the Constant Comparison method of research (GLASER, 1965). The research questions investigated were: (a) what types of intelligence would be highlighted in the show; (b) how would the pets' intelligence be validated; (c) would any reference be made to the intelligence of nonhuman animals generally and to the implications of their intelligence for the ways human animals should treat them; and (d) would non-speciesist language be used when referring to the nonhuman animals?

4 Results

This section first recaps the points the researchers found of interest in the episode on intelligence in the documentary series *The Hidden Lives of Pets*. The episode consists of eight segments. Then, the researchers analyze the data for answers to the research questions listed in the Methodology section.

4.1 Segment 1

The first segment deals with a border collie, Kazuza, who accompanies his human, Bruno, when Bruno does base jumping: using a parachute to jump from a high structure, either a natural structure, such as a cliff (in this case, a 2000-foot cliff), or a built structure, such as a tall building. According to the narrator, initially when they walked in the Swiss mountains, Kazuza would accompany Bruno as an observer when the human base jumped alone, but when Bruno built a special harness so that Kazuza could join Bruno on the jumps, Kazuza displayed no fear before or during the jumps. Kazuza's "emotional intelligence" (4:24) overcomes his innate sense of self-preservation, which otherwise would have stopped him from being a willing participant in base jumping. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as understanding and knowledge of the emotions of oneself and others. According to the documentary, Kazuza trusts Bruno based on his being a very smart dog who can read his human's body language (6:07). Bruno even claims, perhaps jokingly, to believe that Kazuza is a person who was reincarnated as a dog (6:20).

4.2 Segment 2

The episode's second segment tells about Snowball, a male rescue sulphur-crested cockatoo living at a parrot sanctuary. Sanctuaries exist to protect abused and abandoned animals including humans, e.g., some sanctuaries protect farmed animals, such as chickens, cows, and pigs, who would otherwise be killed for their flesh (ABRELL, 2017). Snowball was filmed by people at the sanctuary and became famous, with approximately seven million people viewing him dancing on YouTube. His YouTube dancing brought Snowball to the attention of neuroscience researchers at the University of California. In the documentary, the neuroscientists explain that Snowball is not

copying his dance moves; his dancing is creative (8:30), developing over time in response to music, not by watching humans dance. The neuroscientists also refer to a social element to cockatoos' intelligence, stating that these birds are more likely to dance when a partner joins them.

4.3 Segment 3

The documentary's narrator observed, "The more we enrich our pets' world, the happier they become" (10:03). Furthermore, "our pets' cognitive levels can be boosted to extraordinary levels with the right environment" (10:20). The third segment provides more examples. Two rats, Sophia (wisdom in ancient Greek) and Alethia (truth in ancient Greek), were selected from among six rats based on unspecified tests to be trained to drive specially designed mini-cars. All six rats had been living in what is described as a "Rat Disneyland" (12:50) where they were able to enjoy a great deal of engagement, i.e., not only engagement with a variety of objects, but also social engagement. The main human in this segment, Kelly Lambert, is a professor at the University of Richmond (USA) who has studied rats for 35 years (e.g., LAMBERT, 2011). "Brains need engagement," (12:35), she notes. Lambert observed that physical activity benefited the rats' brains. Although the two rats have names, nonetheless they are referred to as *it*, e.g., Lambert recalls wondering, in the early stages of the research, "How would you get *it* to activate the car?" (12:01). However, the fact that the rats are discussed as a pair, Sophia and Alethia, or as a larger group makes it easy to use *they*.

4.4 Segment 4

Segment four centers on Bini a Holland Lop Rabbit. His human's name is Shai. When Shai initially brought Bini home, the rabbit was kept in a cage, but soon Shai decided to let Bini go anywhere in the apartment. Shortly afterward, Shai saw a "whole new side of his pet" (16:45). When other humans complain to Shai that their rabbits are not as smart as Bini, Shai attributes the difference not to innate intelligence but to differences in environment. One aspect of Bini's intelligence highlighted in this segment is his cognitive intelligence as reflected in his learning and ability to remember what he learned (18:17), e.g., he quickly learned how to use a paintbrush, and the narrator adds, "With patience, love and plenty of treats, Shai has shown how remarkable a relaxed rabbit can be" (18:43).

4.5 Segment 5

The stars of segment five, Nikki and Jack, are African grey parrots whom the documentary uses to demonstrate altruism as an example of social intelligence in pets. The close-knit sister and brother parrots were part of a study along with many other parrots, done at the Loro Parque Foundation, a zoo in Tenerife, Spain. In this study, the experimenters set up a situation involving two parrots, in which one member of the pair had tokens that could be given to humans to get food, but the other had no tokens. Teamwork and empathy, the narrator explains, are needed (22:43). Jack and Nikki readily shared tokens with each other, indicative of the researchers' finding that the closer the bond between two parrots, the more tokens were shared (22:15). Here, we see the close ties that exist in the animals' lives. The human researcher in this altruism segment states her view that Nikki and Jack's sharing demonstrates "how clever they are and that we [humans] should be very respectful toward parrots, but also other animals" (22:51).

4.6 Segment 6

Segment six features Bill, a dog of the lurcher breed. Lurchers are a cross of a hound and another breed, such as a terrier. Bill lives with two humans, Michele and Russell. After Bill's sister Ruby

passed away suddenly, he became especially close to his humans. When Russell broke an ankle and for a while walked with a limp, whenever Bill accompanied Russell, Bill too would walk with a limp, even though when not with Russell, he would walk or run normally. The producers of the documentary interpret this as Bill pretending to suffer with a limp in order to make Russell, the human, feel loved and not abandoned (26:40).

4.7 Segments 7 and 8

The final five minutes of the episode, the seventh and eighth segments, are devoted to intelligence in two other species of nonhuman animals. Gambit, a bearded dragon, is highlighted for his social ability to copy the behavior of another dragon, i.e., to display social learning (29:04). A gate prevented Gambit from accessing food, but when the researchers made a video of another bearded dragon opening the gate and played it for Gambit, he was able to open the gate. The episode's final segment purports to show that in some cases intelligence matters more than appearances, as two male budgerigars, also known as common parakeets, Albert and Bubba, vie for the attention of Debbie, a female. At first, Debbie is with Bubba. Then, the researchers teach Albert a strategy for getting food. When Albert demonstrates the strategy in front of Debbie and Bubba, and Bubba is unable to replicate it, Debbie strays to Albert. The documentary producers label this as "brains over brawn" (29:07).

4.8 Research Questions (a), (b), and (c)

Research question (a) asked which intelligence the pets in the show would display. As noted earlier in the Results section of this paper, all three intelligences – emotional, social, and cognitive – were displayed. Research question (b) asked how the show would attempt to validate the producers' claims about the pets' intelligence. This was done most obviously by allowing viewers to witness behaviors that most humans would probably not expect the nonhumans animals to be able to carry out. Additionally, the producers showed viewers both animal researchers and the pets' humans explaining what the pets had down and providing some background.

The third research question had two parts. One, would the show go beyond highlighting the intelligence of a small number of carefully selected pets? Would the producers also include any implications for what the feats of intelligence witnessed on the show might have for other animals generally and for humans' treatment of other animals? While the other-than-human animals featured in the show were often praised as being exceptional, e.g., the rats who drove the cars were specially chosen as being most likely to succeed, nonetheless, viewers are frequently told that, with proper treatment from humans, nonhuman animals generally are very capable. The narrator stated, "our pets' cognitive levels can be boosted to extraordinary levels with the right environment" (10:20). To the researchers' knowledge, the only statement made about other-than-human animals generally was by the researcher who spoke during the segment on Nikki and Jackie, the grey parrots. Referring to the parrots, she said, "how clever they are and that we [humans] should be very respectful toward parrots, but also other animals."

4.9 Pronouns

Research question (d) asked about the use of speciesist pronouns when referring to the pets. Table 2 indicates whether *she, he,* or *it* was used by the humans in each of the eight segments of the intelligence episode of *The Hidden Lives of Pets*.

Segment	Animal Species	Is *he* or *she* used or *it*?
1	Dog	He
2	Cockatoo	He
3	Rats	It
4	Rabbit	He
5	Parrot	It
6	Dog	He
7	Bearded Dragon	He
8	Budgerigar	He and She

Table 2 – Use of *she*, *he*, or *it* to refer to the nonhuman animals in eight segments of the first episode of *The Hidden Lives of Pets*.

5. Discussion

5.1 A Variety of Species

A few points stood out for their presence or absence in the opening episode of *The Hidden Lives of Pets*, the episode on intelligence. One, as to presence, the episode featured a wide array of examples of the intelligence of various animal species, including not only mammals who are sometimes considered to be "higher animals," but also three bird species and one reptile species. The types of intelligence displayed included emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence, and social intelligence. These displays raised further questions as to whether mistreatment of nonhuman animals can be justified by claiming that nonhuman animals lack intelligence and, therefore, deserve to be treated in line with Descartes' view, to be treated as objects, rather than sentient beings.

5.2 Pronoun Variation

Second, Table 2 provides data related to research question (d). As noted earlier in this article, the use of the pronouns *he* and *she*, similar to the use of the relative pronoun *who*, aligns with a view of our fellow animals as sentient beings, whereas the use of *it*, similar to the use of the relative pronouns *that* and *which*, aligns with a view of our fellow animals as objects. In six of the eight segments of the episode on companion animals' intelligence, *she* and *he* were used. Given trends toward greater concern for other animals and greater understanding of their intelligence, it was not surprising that the majority of humans used pronouns in line with the documentary's view of the nonhumans' animal intelligence. What was surprising was that the only two humans using *it* were people whose professions involve studying the intelligence of nonhuman animals: the researchers in segment three (rats) and segment five (parrots).

5.3 Erasure

The third point that stood out in the results, in relation to research question (c) was the absence of attention to non-pets, in particular the animals whom humans raise for food, e.g., the more than 70 billion land animals slaughtered annually for use as food by humans and humans' pets, not to mention the hundreds of billions, possibly trillions, of marine animals (HUSSSAIN, 2021). Stibbe (2021) referred to this absence as erasure, i.e., beings or things are not mentioned as they are seen as unimportant. Of course, language has a dual role, both reflecting language users' views and

promoting views among those who hear and read the language produced by others. Perhaps, the producers of the documentary and those who appear in the documentary, the featured companion animals' humans and the researchers do care about nonhuman animals other than pets, e.g., the researcher in the segment on empathy in parrots urged that humans should be "very respectful toward parrots, but also other animals" (22:51). Furthermore, the theme of the documentary in all four of its episodes is the incredible abilities of nonhuman animals.

Unfortunately, the lives of so many other of humans' fellow animals approach being the exact opposite of the lives of the animals featured in the documentary, but viewers see and hear nothing about these other animals. In the documentary, viewers witness affection, care, mental stimulation, social interaction with others including humans, opportunities for physical activity, more than adequate space, and sufficient food. As the narrator stated, "our pets' cognitive levels can be boosted to extraordinary levels with the right environment" (10:20). Tragically, due to economic imperatives played out in the use of animals for food, on Confined Animal Food Operations (CAFOs), known less euphemistically as "factory farms." On CAFOs, the sentient beings whom humans use for food are subjected to such practices as chickens having their beaks cut so they are less like to injure each other when, as standard operating procedure, thousands of chickens are confined together in windowless buildings, female cows being forcibly impregnated followed (after a pregnancy of about nine months) by removal of their children almost immediately after birth, and species being genetically manipulated in a manner similar to the ways equipment produced in a factory is manipulated to save costs and meet customer preferences. How can these animals develop and manifest their intelligence? How can humans enjoy interaction with these animals, the way that humans in the documentary enjoyed being with their animal companions?

5.4 Conviction and Ideologies

In addition to erasure, two other potentially relevant categories from Stibbe's eight categories for ecolinguistics are conviction and ideologies. Conviction relates to research question (b) how the producers sought to persuade viewers of the accuracy of the show's claims about the animals' capacities. Research on animal sentience has often been questioned, with sceptics wondering how humans can understand the thoughts, emotions, and actions of nonhumans, e.g., a famous area of controversy involves whether fishes feel pain (ROSE et al., 2014). The documentary supports its accuracy via video footage, the backstory supplied on both the nonhuman and human characters in its eight segments, and the use of scientists talking about and showing their research.

Ideologies in Stibbe's system refers to stories shared within groups in society about how the world was, is, will, or should be. Of particular relevance to this article are stories about the place of humans among the other animals. Harari recounted a time about 70,000 years ago when humans were "an animal of no significance" (HARARI, 2014, p. 3). Now, for many humans, other animals' right to exist depends on what they do for humans. For most of these other animals, the story told is that their contribution to humans justifies them being killed by humans who use them, as humans have done for millennia, but on a much smaller, much less industrialized scale, for food and clothing. However, in the case of pets, humans use them for companionship and entertainment. The documentary implies that because companion animals are higher in emotional, cognitive, and social intelligence, they are better companions and have more entertainment value. The implication is that other animals have no intrinsic right to exist.

Are the animals celebrated in the documentary different from the less fortunate members of the animal kingdom, those doomed to live greatly shortened lives in CAFOs? The “meat paradox,” mentioned earlier, might partially explain why “people may emphasize their concern for animal welfare and yet eat meat, the production of which has caused suffering to nonhuman creatures” (AALTOLA, 2019, p. 1125). Other researchers have also investigated this issue, e.g., Joy (2020) posited that humans see their species as superior and view meat eating of some animal species as fulfilling four Ns: "natural," "normal," "necessary," and (sometimes) "nice." Fortunately, one increasingly feasible method by which humans can cut their reliance on food from animals: using new alternative protein foods (Good Food Institute, 2022) to feed their omnivorous and carnivorous pets (BERRY, 2020).

5.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study had important limitations that could be addressed by future research. Most obviously, the impact of the show on viewers was not studied. For example, a pre-test/post-test survey of viewers’ opinions as to the intelligence of nonhuman animals, as well as viewers’ behaviors toward nonhuman animals could be done. Also, given this show’s overwhelmingly positive view of the intelligence of the nonhuman animals featured therein, it would be interesting to examine the views presented by other shows on pets or, more broadly, on other animals, e.g., many shows depict the lives of wild animals. These other animals have not been trained by humans to exhibit behaviors such as those featured in the show. However, depending on viewers’ perspectives, the natural behaviors of nonhuman animals might be seen as equally impressive. On the other hand, conceivably the show has an anthropocentric message, i.e., other animals can only excel with human support and guidance.

Another limitation of the study was that no effort was made to contrast the behavior of other-than-human animals in the show, animals who appeared to be given a high level of care, as well as training, with farmed animals whose lives appear to be at the other extreme of the spectrum. Such a contrast would provide insight into how important that treatment of the other-than-human animals on the show was to the behaviors they displayed. Relatedly, does the treatment that humans mete out to farmed animals retard the develop of these animals’ intelligence (POLANCO et al., 2021), and can the damage be undone? Perhaps, animal sanctuaries could serve as a venue for such investigations. The researchers in the present study hoped unsuccessfully to speak with some of the humans who appeared in and produced the show. Future researchers might wish to try hard and more skillfully to achieve this. Additionally, studies could contrast media produced by people with different views toward nonhuman animals, e.g., Jacobs and Dillion (2019) contrasted advertisements made by makers of plant-based burgers with advertisements made by manufacturers of burgers made from animals raised on CAFOs.

6. Conclusion

The episode on intelligence in the documentary “The Hidden Lives of Pets” was analyzed using various ecolinguistic tools. The episode further popularizes the growing body of evidence, both from the lay public and from researchers, that humans are sharing the Earth with many other intelligent animals. After reviewing some of the literature on nonhuman animals in various forms of the media, the present article summarized the eight segments of the episode, each segment on one or more members of a different animal species. These animals demonstrated a wide range of

emotional, social, and cognitive intelligences, although at the same time, it was noted that the environments in which these pets lived were highly conducive to the development and display of intelligences. While to be praised for showing the powerful examples of so many other-than-human animals seemingly being treated well and thriving, the documentary seems to have decided to support viewers' happiness, but also viewers' ignorance, by erasing from view the lives of the far larger numbers of animals who are negatively impacted by their interaction with humans.

The authors of the present article contrasted the highly favorable life circumstances of the nonhuman animals in the show with the almost unimaginably unfavorable circumstances of nonhuman animals being raised for food. Future research can examine the potential role of the media in convincing humans to treat more animals the way that the pets in the documentary are treated, for the benefit of both other animals and humans. Perhaps, alternative protein foods, mentioned above as a food source for pets, can also feed some humans, thereby making it easier for humans to show empathy toward a greater range of other animals, not only pets.

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