

## **Review of *Animal Equality: Language And Liberation***

Joan Dunayer (2001)  
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### **Review by George M. Jacobs, Broward Community College (Singapore campus)**

What is a book like this - on the language we use when referring to our fellow animals - doing in the Review section of a journal for language educators and researchers? The book is here because language is powerful – it reflects and shapes how we think and act, and language is ever-changing (Crystal, 1995; Halliday, 1978; Whorf, 1956). The power of language and its changing nature make language an area of contention in which activists for societal transformation seek to use language as a tool for change and advocates of the status quo seek to resist change. Language educators are inevitably involved, whether we want to be or not, and language researchers may find such areas fertile grounds for investigation.

For example, the area of human rights has seen and continues to see many conflicts over language. A case in point is that today the term *African-American* is often used for people in the U.S. who are descended from slaves brought from Africa in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. English teachers need to help their students learn that the use of other terms for these people, terms such as *colored*, *negro*, and *nigger*, are generally seen as inappropriate if not derogatory and inflammatory.

Perhaps the best example of how the intersection of language and human rights has put English teachers in the middle of controversy regards language changes related to the issue of the relative place of females and males in human society (Cameron, 1995). A prominent grammatical change that has taken place in this area has been the move from generic *he* (use of male pronouns – *he*, *his* – and the male possessive adjective – *his* – in a way that implies males are representative of females and males), such as using “A doctor should take care of his patients” to include all doctors, female and male. Instead, people nowadays are more likely to use, “Doctors should take care of their patients,” “A doctor should take care of her/his patients,” “A doctor should take care of their patients,” and other alternatives that do not place males as representatives of all humans.

Similarly, in the area of vocabulary, alternatives have arisen for generic *man* (the use of male nouns to imply that males are representative of females and males). For instance, instead of *fireman* and *policeman*, people nowadays are more likely to use *firefighter* and *police officer*. Instead of *man and wife*, we might use *husband and wife*.

These language changes in regard to the roles of the sexes have both reflected change and promoted change. However, the changes have not been automatic or uncontroversial. Nor are the changes complete. Generic *he* and generic *man* are still in use, e.g., they remain

the norm in *The Straits Times*, the prestige English language newspaper in Singapore (<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>).

*Animal Equality: Language and Liberation* deals with another type of rights issue, not human rights but the extension of some of those rights to other animals. Indeed, the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an increase both in our understanding that other animals also think and feel, and in our concern for protecting these nonhuman animals (NHAs) from the suffering we humans cause via environmental destruction, eating the flesh of other animals, using them in research, wearing their skin and fur, hunting them for sport, and imprisoning them in zoos and circuses (<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0804083.html>).

Just as other social movements have led to and advocated language changes, so too is this movement for the rights and welfare of our fellow animals (<http://www.ecoling.net>). And, like other movements have used terms such as racism and sexism to label discriminatory beliefs and practices, Joan Dunayer uses the term *speciesism* and defines it as “a failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any nonhuman being equal consideration and respect” (Dunayer, 2004: 5).

*Animal Equality: Language and Liberation* is all about why and how to avoid speciesism. Dunayer formerly conducted research using NHAs, such as rats. Having previously earned master’s degrees in English education and English literature, she then turned to teaching college English and working as a writer and editor. Thus, she is knowledgeable about language and how it works.

The book’s 12 chapters can be read all the way through, or the book can be treated as a reference work, with an 8-page set of style guidelines, 16-page thesaurus of alternatives to speciesist terms, 38-page section of notes, 6-page bibliography, and 18-page index.

For example, the style guidelines include such advice as using “*animals* to include all creatures (human and nonhuman) with a nervous system” (p. 180) and avoiding “category labels that vilify nonhumans (*vermin; pests; trash fish*)” (p. 181). The thesaurus contains terms to avoid and provides suggested alternatives, e.g., instead of *veal*, Dunayer recommends *calf flesh*, and instead of *circus animal*, *circus captive*.

The book’s 12 chapters begin with an overview of speciesism and language in Chapter 1. Dunayer sees speciesist use of language as a means of self-justification of the way we mistreat our fellow animals. In the same vein, Chapter 2 looks at false categories set up to separate animals into us and them, e.g., talking about *humans and animals* as if we humans aren’t animals or talking about primates and apes as if we aren’t apes. Similarly, Dunayer decries categorizing animals into lower and higher with humans at the top of the hierarchy.

Chapter 3 is my favorite, filled with stories of the attributes of our fellow animals. To illustrate that the dichotomy between animal instinct and human intelligence may be a false one, Dunayer reports the story of the relationship between the cocker spaniel Rusty

and the raccoon Snoopy (North, 1966, pp. 151-152). When Rusty needed help opening the screen door of his house, he would go off to the woods to find Snoopy, who would open the door and then return to the woods. Other false nonhuman-human dichotomies explored include maternal instinct vs. motherly love, mating vs. romantic love, and brutality vs. human kindness.

Chapters 4-9 take on specific areas in which humans mistreat other animals: hunting, sportfishing, zoos, aquariums, vivisection, and consumption of flesh, eggs, and milk. Chapter 10, "Pronoun Politics," looks at issues such as the use of *who* with all animals, not just human animals. For more on this issue, see <http://www.ecoling.net/who.html>

Chapter 11, "'Bitches,' 'Monkeys,' and 'Guinea Pigs,'" looks at metaphors and links the use of metaphors that support discrimination against non-human animals with discrimination against females (e.g., "bitches") and blacks (e.g., "monkeys"). Chapter 12, the last chapter before the style guidelines and thesaurus, examines legal roadblocks to animal equality.

For a sample of some of what Dunayer means by speciesist language use and alternatives, please see Table 1 below. In the table, the first column contains speciesist language, the second column contains nonspeciesist alternatives, and the third column contains sentences that provide first speciesist and then nonspeciesist examples of the language element depicted in that row. Explanations accompany language items in columns one and two. To join an internet discussion group on this topic, go to: <http://www.freeforum101.com/forum/?mforum=ecolinguistics>.

Table 1: Examples of speciesist and nonspeciesist language use  
(Dunayer, 2001)

Speciesist vocabulary (with explanation)	Vegetarian vocabulary (with explanation)	Examples
<i>Anything</i> (NHAs are seen as things)	<i>Anyone, anybody</i> (NHAs are sentient beings)	There are many crows and other birds in that tree. If a bullet is fired into the tree, <u>anything</u> could be hit and die. There are many crows and other birds in that tree. If a bullet is fired into the tree, <u>anyone/anybody</u> could be hit and die.
<i>It</i> (NHAs are sexless things)	<i>She, he, they, he or she</i> (NHAs have sexual characteristics, just like humans)	When an <u>animal</u> is ill, take <u>it</u> to a veterinarian. When a <u>nonhuman animal</u> is ill, take <u>them/her or him</u> to a veterinarian.
<i>Which</i> ( <i>which</i> is used for NHAs, plants, and objects)	<i>Who</i> ( <i>who</i> is used with sentient beings)	The monkeys <u>which</u> live near the temple are a gregarious lot. The monkeys <u>who</u> live near the temple are a gregarious lot.

<p><i>Animals, dumb animals, lower animals</i> (separates humans from other animals and other animals from each other in a prejudicial or hierarchical way)</p>	<p><i>NHAs, other animals, fellow animals, nonhuman persons</i> (links humans and other animals as one group of sentient beings)</p>	<p>Vegetarianism is better for human health and the health of <u>animals</u>. Vegetarianism is better for human health and the health of our <u>fellow animals</u>.</p>
<p><i>Animal instinct</i> (suggests that useful behaviors of NHAs are not the result of intelligence)</p>	<p><i>Instinct, intelligence</i> (stresses that some similarities exist between human mental capacity and that of other animals)</p>	<p>The clever behaviors of the crow are based on <u>animal instinct</u>. The clever behaviors of the crow are based on <u>intelligence</u>.</p>
<p><i>Higher animals</i> (implies that some animals are superior to others and have superior claim to rights)</p>	<p><i>Mammals, vertebrates</i> (a physiological classification, not a value judgment)</p>	<p>Gorillas are one of the <u>higher animals</u> which eat a vegetarian or largely vegetarian diet. Gorillas are one of the <u>vertebrates</u> who eat a vegetarian or largely vegetarian diet.</p>
<p><i>Inhumane</i> (implies that humans are the only typically kind animal and that cruelty is normal for other animals)</p>	<p><i>Cruel</i> (doesn't accord humans special status)</p>	<p>Factory farm owners are <u>inhumane</u> to keep animals in cages so small that they can't even turn around. Factory farm owners are <u>cruel</u> to keep animals in cages so small that they can't even turn around.</p>
<p><i>Sire, gestation, feed on</i> (separate terms for NHAs)</p>	<p><i>Father, pregnancy, eat</i> (same terms for humans and NHAs)</p>	<p>Whether the mother is a Great Dane, or a tiny Chihuahua, the <u>gestation</u> period is the same, approximately nine weeks. Whether the mother is a Great Dane, or a tiny Chihuahua, the <u>pregnancy</u> period is the same, approximately nine weeks.</p>
<p><i>Aquarium animal, zoo animal</i> (don't call aquariums and zoos what they really are)</p>	<p><i>Aquaprison inmate, zoo inmate</i> (call aquariums and zoos what they really are)</p>	<p>One of the <i>zoo animals</i>, an orangutan, just gave birth. Will the baby be returned to the wild? One of the <i>zoo inmates</i>, an orangutan name Myrtle, just gave birth. Will the baby be returned to the wild?</p>

<p><i>Euthanize, put down</i> (euphemisms; soft words for hard deeds)</p>	<p><i>Kill, murder</i> (reflects what too often happens when NHAs are used in research)</p>	<p>After the experiment, the researchers <u>euthanized</u> the chimp, because it was in a great deal of pain, pain that the experimenters had caused. After the experiment, the researchers <u>killed</u> the chimp, because she was in a great deal of pain, pain that the experimenters had caused.</p>
<p><i>Abattoir, meat-packing plant, processing plant</i> (conceals the facility's main purpose from an NHA perspective)</p>	<p><i>Slaughterhouse</i> (from an NHA perspective, clearly names what the facility does)</p>	<p>The broilers were taken to the <u>meat-packing plant</u> for processing. The Tyson employees took the captive chickens to the <u>slaughterhouse</u>.</p>
<p><i>beef, pork, giblets, foie gras, veal</i> (disguises the food's origins)</p>	<p><i>Cow flesh, pig flesh, bird organs, goose or duck liver, calf flesh</i> (candid, out-in-the-open name)</p>	<p>Tender white <u>veal</u> lightly breaded and pan fried, served with a romaine onion salad and <u>foie gras</u>. Tender white <u>calf flesh</u> lightly breaded and pan fried, served with a romaine onion salad and <u>goose liver</u>.</p>
<p>Hedging when attributing emotions and thought to NHAs (implies NHAs don't have emotions and thoughts)</p>		<p>The pigs <u>appeared</u> to be scared, and they seemed to be thinking of a way to escape. The pigs <u>were</u> scared, and they were thinking of a way to escape.</p>
<p>Quotation marks when emotions and thoughts of NHAs are discussed (implies that NHAs don't have thoughts and emotions)</p>	<p>No quotation marks when emotions and thoughts of NHAs are discussed (acknowledges that NHAs have thoughts and emotions)</p>	<p>The pigs were "<u>scared</u>" and "<u>thinking of</u>" a way to escape. The pigs were <u>scared</u> and were <u>thinking of</u> a way to escape.</p>
<p>Passive voice to refer to what humans do to NHAs (hides who is responsible)</p>	<p>Active voice to refer to what humans do to NHAs (names those responsible)</p>	<p>The new-born male chicks <u>were disposed of</u>. The supervisor <u>instructed</u> the staff <u>to kill</u> the new-born male chicks, because males don't lay eggs.</p>
<p>Referring to NHAs by the</p>	<p>Referring to NHAs themselves</p>	<p>The <u>pig farm</u> fouls the air for miles around. The <u>tightly-crowded, imprisoned pigs</u> create</p>

place they are held captive (treats NHAs as commodities)	(suggests NHAs as beings)	so much waste that the air is fouled for miles around.
Almost always placing NHAs after humans in a sentence (implies that NHAs are secondary, lesser)	Sometimes placing NHAs before humans in a sentence (implies equality)	<u>One person and 185 sheep</u> were killed in the flood. <u>One hundred eighty-five sheep and one human</u> were killed in the flood.
Theoretical, general, abstract discussion of NHAs (makes it less likely that readers/listeners will identify with NHAs)	Personalized, specific, concrete discussion of NHAs (encourages readers/listeners to identify with NHAs)	<u>Pigs</u> have committed no crime, yet they face life imprisonment on factory farms. <u>Alice</u> was born on Giant Agribusiness Farm in Pittsfield, Iowa. Her cell is 6'x2' with a steel floor and steel bars.
Idioms that trivialize violence against NHAs (make violence against NHAs seem acceptable)	Non-speciesist idioms (promote language use that promotes respect for all animals)	Always remember that "there's more than one way to <u>skin a cat</u> ." Always remember that "there's more than one way to <u>eat a mango</u> ."

No doubt, some people will groan when they hear the ideas in this book and say, "Oh no, not another way for the politically correct (PC) police to tyrannize people." To this, Dunayer would probably respond that the changes she suggests are not about twisting language but about clarifying language use. For example, using *calf flesh* instead of *veal* makes clear exactly what people are eating. Furthermore, avoiding speciesism in language rather than being about some kind of tyranny is about uniting humans with our fellow animals to move toward a better, more egalitarian world. After all, where is the joy in imprisoning billions of our fellow animals?

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### **About the reviewer**

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