



Book Review

Lazutkaite Elena, *Re/thinking chicken. The discourse around chicken farming in British newspaper and campaigners' magazines, 1982-2016.* Vernon Press, 2020; ISBN: 9781648890123.

Reviewed by

Diego Forte

University of Buenos Aires

E-mail: dforte@filo.uba.ar

In the context of the current pandemic, and when our relationship with other species is in the public eye, analysing the discursive construction of non-human animals in the media becomes a priority issue. In our human society, chickens hold a special place, being one of the most exploited and most invisible animals. Constantly objectified, there is no circumstance in which they are considered as anything other than meat, eggs or clothing material. In this scenario, Lazutkaite presents a case study with a very strong data-based analysis on the construction of chickens found in the texts of British newspapers and campaigners during the period 1982-2016. The book constitutes the rewriting of Lazutkaité's PhD thesis and brings together a large number of texts, and a corpus linguistics methodology allows her to offer an exhaustive analysis. Her study can be seen as a very useful handbook on how dominant discourses operate, not only in the discourses of traditional mass media but in the texts produced by NGOs and campaigners too.

Keeping a close relationship with the format of its original version, *Re/thinking Chickens* follows the structure of a dissertation: subject, theory, corpus, analysis, conclusions, providing a good amount of contextual data in every step of the way. Chapter 1 introduces the scope of research, aims and starting questions, including the author's perspective and a detailed description of the (non-speciesist) vocabulary used in the research. Lazutkaite also introduces her background in Critical Animal Studies (CAS), and a perspective that includes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as her researcher's positionality prior to the analysis, stating her aim is to serve as a basis for a change in "real life". Moreover, an extended illustration of the situation of farmed chickens in Britain and the wider world for the period analysed (1982-2016) is incorporated. The aim of the chapter is to present the researcher's starting point and to deepen on the way newspapers choose their topics, lexis, and sources to cite, whilst producing identities and shaping public discourses about chicken

farming. Since people may have little or no knowledge nor direct experience of chicken farming, the importance newspapers have in creating meaning is significant.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework adopted, the moral arguments with regards to the treatment of non-human animals and reviews relevant literature on discursive non-human animal representation. Although an outline of the framework (CAS, CDA) is presented in chapter 1, here it is described in full and correlated with the discursive representation of non-human animals in human societies: species discrimination, objectifying language, media representations, and campaigners' rhetoric. Several theories on non-human animal representation are reviewed. The perspective presented includes texts produced by the likes of Singer (1975), Regan (1983, 2003), feminists' intersections between sexism and animal oppression as well as the deconstruction of gendered discourses around animal farming (Adams, 1990, 2003; Davis, 1995; Dunayer, 1995, Kalechofsky, 2003, Kappeler, 1995), ending with contributions to language and linguistic analysis (Croney and Reynnells, 2008; Mitchell, 2006, 2012, 2013; Stibbe, 2001, 2003, 2012).

Chapter 3 focuses on data resources and methods for analysis. Materials taken from newspapers is sorted between tabloid and broadsheet journalism. The tabloids considered in the study are *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail*; while the broadsheets observed are *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. These papers were chosen, as declared by Lazutkaite, for being '*major mainstream dailies and suitable for research purposes due to their political-cultural stances, high circulation figures and the demographic profiles of their readership that capture different segments of society*' (2020: 39). Among the campaigners, the two organizations chosen are *Compassion in World Farming* (CIWF) and *Animal Aid* (AA). As a charity, CIWF focuses on the welfare of farmed animals and is not a vegetarian organisation. The organization actually states that its mission is 'to end factory farming and advance the wellbeing of farm animals worldwide' (CIWF, 2015: 5). Due to its visibility in the British media and its influence in the process of policymaking, having more than fifty years of experience in campaigning for the welfare of chickens, CIWF was almost a mandatory choice to include. Instead, *Animal Aid*, one of the oldest and largest animal rights organizations in the UK (Animal Aid, 2016) was chosen due to its history and development, its support to CIWF, which evidences a common ground for both organizations, and because of its particular use of linguistic constructions aimed to inspire compassion towards chicken. This chapter closes with the development of the theoretical framework, discussing the use of Critical Discourse Analysis with ecological and antispeciesist perspectives and by presenting the methodology applied.

Chapter 4 analyses the data from newspapers. The chapter opens with an overview of the paper's corpora and an explanation of the temporal ups and downs in the flow of publications about chickens for the period observed; this is immediately followed by some comments about the apparitions of CIWF and AA in the newspapers. The analysis starts with the broadsheet *The Guardian* and then moves on to *The Mirror*, ending with *The Telegraph* and *The Mail*. The order is

given by several criteria: size of the corpus, political orientation, type of paper. In this way, the analysis starts with the left-leaning broadsheet The Guardian and tabloid The Mirror, followed by the right-leaning broadsheet Telegraph and tabloid Mail. The analysis follows the same structure in all four cases: first, dominant themes and narratives are outlined. In *Normalising chicken farming*, the author investigates how a newspaper reproduces dominant ideologies and instrumentalises chickens. In the next section, *Problematising chicken farming/ alternative discourses*, the openings for change are shown. Finally, a brief summary discusses the findings for every case.

Chapter 5 analyses the campaigners' discourses. As the previous chapter, it starts with an overview of the corpora. Given the large difference in size, the CIWF and AA corpora are discussed together. The campaigners' magazines include news reports, features, interviews, shopping guides, book reviews, etc. Due to the format of campaigns, visual representation is included although it only deals with the complementary images present in the texts. The structure of the analysis follows, more or less, the pattern of chapter 4. The categories adopted are *intensive farming*, *higher welfare*, *challenges to higher welfare*, *harm to humans*, *chickens as agents* and *visual representation*. As in newspapers' case, the chapter ends with a summary and brief discussion of the findings.

Chapter 6 expands the discussion on the results by considering critical reflections and the limitations of the study. Going beyond the traditional academic format, which calls for further research, the findings are integrated in order to illustrate the present situation and proposals for the future. The final discussion centres around the naturalization of the violence towards chicken and the procedures through which speciesism prevails, considering the intersections between veganism and environmentalism. Even though the description of the current situation in Britain can be bleak, the book concludes with some hopeful remarks that highlight the small but strong steps forward that can lead to real change. Lazutkaite's final statement is a call for novel discourses to challenge the largely unacknowledged violence towards chickens; "*discourses that, where practically possible, would reject the notion of farmed animals as food*" (2020: 215).

Even though the author's final considerations have to do with British texts, many – if not all – can be applied across Western society and its industrial logic. *Re/thinking chickens* is a necessary work for researchers of different fields but mostly for people concerned with a more equal and healthy world. A world that is showing us right now how problematic we are as a species.

References

- Adams, C. (1990). *Sexual Politics of Meat: A feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Adams, C. (2003). *The Pornography of Meat*. London: Continuum.
- Animal Aid (2016). *About Animal Aid*. Retrieved July 17, 2016, from <http://www.animalaid.org.uk/h/n/ABOUT/>
- CIWF (2015). *Compassion In World Farming Master Brand Toolkit*. Retrieved May 13, 2015, from <http://ciwf.assetbank-server.com/assetbank-ciwf/assetfile/41914.pdf>
- Croney, C.C. & Reynnells, R.D. (2008). The ethics of semantics: do we clarify or obfuscate reality to influence perceptions of farm animal production? *Poultry Science*, 87 (2), 387-391.
- Davis, K. (1995). Thinking like a chicken: farm animals and the feminine connection. In C. J. Adams, & J. Donovan (Eds.), *Women and Animals: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (pp. 192-212). Duke University Press.
- Dunayer, J. (1995). Sexist words, Speciesists roots. In C. J. Adams, & J. Donovan (Eds.), *Women and Animals: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (pp. 11-31). Duke University Press.
- Kalechofsky, R. (2003). *Animal Suffering and the Holocaust: The Problem with Comparisons*. Micah Publications.
- Kappeler, S. (1995). Speciesism, racism, nationalism ... or the power of scientific subjectivity. In C. J. Adams, & J. Donovan (Eds.), *Women and Animals: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (pp. 320-352). Duke University Press.
- Mitchell, L. (2006). Animals and the discourse of farming in Southern Africa. *Society and Animals*, 14 (1), 39-59.
- Mitchell, L. (2012). Nonhumans and the ideology of purpose. *Anthrozoos*, 25 (4), 491-502.
- Mitchell, L. (2013). Farming: Animals or machines? *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 31 (3), 299-309.
- Regan, T. (1983). *The Case for Animal Rights*. University of California.
- Regan, T. (2003). *Animal Rights, Human Wrongs*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal Liberation: A New Ethic of Our Treatment of Animals*. Avon.
- Stibbe, A. (2001). Language, power and the social construction of animals. *Society and Animals*, 9 (2), 145-161.
- Stibbe, A. (2003). As charming as a pig: The discursive Construction of the Relationship between Pigs and Humans. *Society and Animals*, 11 (4), 375-392.
- Stibbe, A. (2012). *Animals Erased. Discourse, Ecology, and the Reconnection with the Natural World*. Wesleyan Press.