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**Article**

## Commodification as sustainability: An ecolinguistic study of Swedish wildlife management discourse

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### Abstract

The ecological and biodiversity crises oblige us to re-examine our species' anthropocentric assumptions about wild animals and to acknowledge their importance in ecosystems that provide the very foundations of our own existence. One way to do this is to critically analyze and expose representations of wild animals and our relationships with them in symbolic systems of meaning. Strategy reports from official environmental agencies can represent sources of normative orientations on our understandings of nature. Thus, to understand how wild animals are constructed by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, this study applied a qualitative, eco-critical discourse analysis to its 2018 wildlife management strategy report, paying close attention to the micro discursive construction of wild animal agency and passivation. The findings showed the presence of a constellation of discursive themes which functions to suppress notions of wild animals' ecological agency in ecosystems, problematize their presence in nature, and construct them as a sustainable resource for entertainment and food. These findings highlight the importance of researching interactions between discursive formations. They also have significant nature policy implications regarding possibilities for rewilding in Sweden.

**Keywords:** wildlife management; ecolinguistics; critical discourse analysis; agency; passivation

### 1. Introduction

In the field of nature conservation, there has been a growing call for large areas of the planet to be devoted to nature so that ecosystems and their hosts of organisms can recover

free from the pressures imposed by humankind. Perhaps the most radical example of this position is the *Half-Earth* project founded by Edward Wilson (2016), which, as the name suggests, calls for fifty percent of the planet to be given over to nature and wildlife conservation. This idea is also seeing support through the popularity of the many rewilding programs around the world. An example of the implementation of this movement at an institutional level is the EU Commission's 2030 biodiversity strategy, which acknowledges nature's agency in promoting the health of ecosystems and thus aims to achieve areas of protection free from human control that are "large enough for key natural processes to take place essentially undisturbed" (EC, 2022, p. 20).

Conversely, some theorists writing from the field of new conservation question the notion of a sovereign nature in the era of the Anthropocene (e.g., Kareiva & Marvier, 2007; Marris, 2011). They argue that the human impact on the natural world has been so extensive and far-reaching that, in much of the world, nature can never return to its unaltered, pre-industrial state (Kareiva & Marvier, 2007, p. 56). The natural world should, according to this perspective, be extensively managed for both the maximization of benefits to human beings as well as protecting the compromised version of nature that still exists. Such a position thus views the non-human world as mechanistic, passive, and as the affected entity of human control and management rather than as agential and able to engage in life-sustaining processes in ecosystems.

Thus, rather than being a pragmatic and depoliticized field, wildlife and nature conservation and their associated discourses are inherently political and ideological (Dryzek, 2013). One method for researching social and political systems is through investigating representations of phenomena and entities that are found in language use and how these are formulated and constructed (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, by investigating strategy documents released by governmental nature protection agencies, we can examine the symbolic and linguistic blueprints that undergird and determine the ideological orientation of wildlife and nature protection strategies. Along these lines, this study draws on Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and ecolinguistics in order to investigate the linguistic representation of wildlife that is constructed and promoted in Sweden by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (*Naturvårdsverket* hereafter). This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the following research questions:

- 1) How does Naturvårdsverket linguistically represent wild animal agency and the human relationship with wildlife in their 2018 *Strategy for Swedish Wildlife Management*?
- 2) What aspects of language or discursive features does the report use in order to construct these representations?

## 2. Background

### 2.1. A Foucauldian notion of discourse

Highly influential in forming modern notions of discourse analysis, Michel Foucault (1972)

conceptualized discourses as not only systems of representation but also “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Foucault viewed discourses as relating to “the domain of statements” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 123). A statement for Foucault is a series of signs that has an enunciative field or referent, a subject to produce them, and an associated field of other statements (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 97-98). A discourse, on the other hand, is defined as any group of statements that is distinct from other groups of statements (Foucault, 1972, p. 86). For Foucault, discourses are never comprised of just one statement or example of language (Hall, 2001, p. 72). Instead, the concept relates to the more abstract notion of a set of narrative themes that all statements within a group share. For example, Jäger and Maier (2015) suggest that groups of such statements set out “all the kernels of meaning that constitute the ‘atoms’ of a particular discourse” (p. 121). These ideational representations manifest their constructions of reality across a range of texts and societal practices and represent particular kinds of knowledge and ways of conceptualizing the world (Hall, 2001, p. 73).

Discourses can interact with each other in a range of ways, each with its own discursive effects. They can both compete with and dominate other discourses in addition to complementing each other. They can also merge and hybridize as well as drawing on each other’s ways of constructing the world (Fairclough, 2003, p. 128). Discourses can also become entangled with other discourses, thus creating particular associations between different entities or concepts for ideological effect (Jäger & Maier, 2015, p. 122). An important concept within a Foucauldian perspective on discourse is a recognition of how discourses form complexes of power by interacting with institutional practices to define certain forms of knowledge as *regimes of truth* as well as ways of assessing the validity of knowledge (Foucault, 2019/1975, p. 23; 1977, p. 13).

## 2.2. A Foucauldian discourse analysis

In their framework for conducting Foucauldian critical discourse analyses, Jäger and Maier (2015) distinguish between discourses and “discourse strands” (p. 121). They conceptualize the former as abstract systems of meaning-making and representations that span texts and practices. A “discourse strand”, on the other hand, can be understood as the material manifestation of a discourse within texts and other forms of semiosis. Each discourse strand can be constituted by several sub-themes (Jäger & Mair, 2015, p. 121).

Fairclough distinguishes on the one hand between what we can understand as a typical Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, concerned with groups of statements forming broader stretches of discourse, and on the other, textual analyses that employ detailed linguistic investigations of smaller discursive features (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 123-133). The latter are based on the notion that separate discourses are comprised of an overall “discursive structure” which can be seen through “the systematicity of the ideas, opinions” and “concepts” that comprise it (Mills, 1997, p. 17). These “representations and systems of meaning” are expressed within texts by constellations of linguistic elements (Glynos et

al., 2009, p. 8). It is these “linguistic traces” that allow the analyst access to the discursive positions that manifest in texts (Sunderland, 2004, p. 7). Indeed, Jäger and Maier (2015) acknowledge that close, linguistic analyses of discursive and linguistic features can also be incorporated into a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis and that such an addition can complement discourse analyses by facilitating an examination of “the more subtle workings of texts” (p. 120). Thus, overall discourse strands and their subordinate themes can be understood as being comprised of a range of individual “discourse fragments” (Jäger & Maier, 2015, p. 120).

This study uses the concept of *discourse fragment* to refer to individual discursive features, such as processes within clauses. These individual features of language are seen as forming patterns of representation that can themselves be understood as the subordinate themes comprising overall discourse strands within texts. Thus, this study applies a fine-grained, linguistic analysis of discursive features to a Foucauldian discourse analysis to investigate the discursive representation of wild animals by Naturvårdsverket.

### 2.3. Agency and nature

As mentioned above, nature conservation is a politicized field with different discourses suggesting very different practices and perspectives. Within the field of ecology, it is recognized that wild animals’ agency and participation in ecological processes are crucial for the formation and maintenance of healthy ecosystems. For example, the actions of predatory species have a significant impact on the movement of nutrients through ecological webs and regulate the structure of ecosystems (Terborgh et al., 1999), thus creating living conditions for other species (Washington, 2013; 2020, p. 47). Accordingly, the rewilding movement, as a form of nature conservation, is associated with discourses of possible futures, or “imaginaries” (Fairclough, 2003) that feature and promote the establishment of large, protected areas in which natural processes are allowed to occur unhindered by human impact. In stark contrast, the discourse of *New Conservation* encourages the control and management of nature (Washington, 2020).

This latter perspective is underpinned by an anthropocentric worldview. A major conceptual theme running through anthropocentrism is the notion that non-human nature represents nothing other than a resource for humankind due to its presumed passivity and lack of agency. Many consider this perspective to have cultural and historical origins. For example, within the field of ecocriticism, anthropocentrism is often attributed to the book of Genesis, where according to some biblical interpretations of the word *dominion*, humans are given the mandate as agential beings to take control of the Earth, while subduing and passivating all else that lives (Klages, 2017, p. 143). Other theorists point to perspectives that emerged during the Enlightenment. For example, Isaac Newton established a set of principles based on the laws of motion (Prigogine & Stengers, 1985, p. 62). The preoccupation within Newtonian dynamics of seeing change as indicated by physical and measurable movement backgrounded an appreciation of how chemical and biological

changes can be initiated by non-human phenomena. The result of this was that nature came to be viewed as inanimate, passive, and separate from us (Prigogine & Stengers, 1985, p. 62). For Plumwood (2002), such mechanistic perspectives continue to suppress notions of nature's agency or purpose, deny our dependence upon the life-supporting actions and processes in nature, and position the natural world as an inert realm to be utilized.

Accordingly, symbolic representations of nature are an important area of attention within the field of ecolinguistics. Much work within this field has so far been aligned to linguistically oriented discourse analysis, with analysts relating clusters of linguistic and discursive features to particular ideological constructions, discourses or “stories-we-live-by” that relate to the natural world and our relationship with it (Stibbe, 2015).

### 3. Ecolinguistic studies on the representation of non-human animals

The International Ecolinguistics Association (IEA) defines ecolinguistics as a field that “explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment” (International Ecolinguistics Association, n.d.). While the linguistic construction of wild animals has not been extensively researched, a selection of key studies has demonstrated a prevalence of discourses that construe animals according to an anthropocentric perspective. Cook and Sealey (2018, p. 315) suggest that such metanarratives have a significant bearing on the language we employ in order to relate to and represent non-human animals. For example, in their analysis of a nine-million-word corpus of texts about animals they found that words used to describe animals, such as “wild”, “stray”, and “dangerous”, construed them specifically in ways that related to how they serve human utility (Cook & Sealey, 2018, p. 316). Interestingly, such representations have also been found in texts that position themselves as environmentally sympathetic. For example, Stibbe (2012) investigated the representation of wild fish in the 2005 *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* report and demonstrated how they are rarely portrayed as independent actors in clauses but instead are grammatically embedded within noun phrases as pre- or post-modifiers to head nouns that denote their resourcification. Thus, the report overwhelmingly represents fish as economic commodities (Stibbe, 2012). Such a representation can also be understood as a way of portraying fish as primarily a resource for human consumption as well as suppressing rather than emphasizing a view of fish as sentient, agential, but also ecological entities seeking their own ends and contributing to ecological processes.

Similar patterns to those reported by Stibbe were also demonstrated by Goatly (2017) in his analysis of representations of nature in the *State of the World 2012* report. Goatly found that the overall representation of nature was that of a passive object impacted by human actions. Again, aspects of the living world were often positioned as pre-modifiers and as affected entities of nominalized human processes, as well as impacted entities in clauses.

Another strand of thought comprising the anthropocentric mindset manifests in the desire to emphasize the features of non-humans that distinguish them from humans while

at the same time de-emphasizing areas of similarity and continuity (Plumwood, 2002, p. 11). Goatly (2006) suggests that this perspective plays out in language through our use of animal metaphors by pointing out that “[t]he most common animal metaphors for humans are pejorative, suggesting that it is desirable to distance ourselves from animals, both conceptually and emotionally” (p. 34).

A counter to this position is “critical anthropomorphism”, a perspective that seeks to emphasize characteristics that human and non-human animals share, while at the same time recognizing crucial differences (Burghardt, 1990, pp. 13-14; Garrard, 2012, pp. 154-158). Shared features that can be either acknowledged or denied in other animals are their agency and ability to experience their surroundings. Stibbe (2015) has shown that the use of language in animal rights texts and the genre of New Nature Writing tends to represent both domestic and wild animals as agential through positioning them as the agents of material processes and the subjects of verbs that relate to natural behaviors. Stibbe (2015) makes the case that the discursive patterns in these texts increase their salience as “conscious beings” who engage in “purposeful” activities (p. 176). In their ecolinguistic study of wildlife documentaries, Sealey and Oakley (2013, p. 415) noted the frequent use of the subordinating conjunction *so* and the infinitive marker of purpose *to* in order to attribute a degree of planning, intentionality, and therefore agency to animal behaviors that may in fact be governed by instinct.

However, how the non-human world is both activated and passivated through language use is not always so clear-cut. In her study on relative pronoun usage and foxhunting discourse, Gupta (2006) found that writers in favor of foxhunting as opposed to those against it were more likely to use the relative pronoun *who* than the pronouns *which* or *that* for anaphoric reference to foxes in texts. Gupta concludes that writers who are positive towards foxhunting view the fox as an active participant in the hunt rather than merely the passive, affected entity of human actions. The linguistic backgrounding or foregrounding of agency can, therefore, be used to serve particular interests.

Despite this work on animal representation, the discourses of national wildlife management and nature protection agencies as examples of discursive language use with local significance are currently under-examined. This study therefore aims to understand how wild animals are viewed and represented within the context of wildlife management discourse more broadly and Naturvårdsverket in Sweden more specifically.

#### 4. Data and methods

Naturvårdsverket’s 2018 *Wildlife Management Strategy Report* was chosen as it represents the agency’s discursive position on society’s relationship with wild animals in Sweden. This study analyzed the 5673-word, English-language version of the report. This text is a more comprehensive version (50% longer) of the Swedish-language original and is published online (Strategi för svensk viltförvaltning 2015-2021). The title of the Swedish-language version uses the Swedish word *viltförvaltning*, which has been translated to *wildlife management*

in the English version. The Swedish noun “vilt” is often used as a synonym of wildlife but is used in the report to refer to animals that Naturvårdsverket promotes as “hunnable” or potentially hunnable in the future (Strategy for Swedish Wildlife Management, 2018). In Sweden, there are currently sixty-three species that come within this category of “hunnable” wildlife, including a wide range of bird species, including capercaillie, as well as herbivorous and predatory mammals, such as badgers, red foxes, and beavers. This report, therefore, stands as a good indicator of how many species of Swedish wild animals are currently viewed by Naturvårdsverket.

Overall, this study utilizes a qualitative and interpretive Foucauldian approach to critical discourse studies, but it also incorporates a focus on the relative frequency with which particular discursive features are used. The study also draws on Fairclough’s concept of critical discourse analysis (2003) as well as van Leeuwen’s social action and actor networks (2008). In order to identify all the discourse fragments that relate to representations of wild animals, the report was searched for linguistic features that referred to the phrases *wildlife* and *wild animals*, but also the names of specific types of animals. The identified discourse fragments were subjected to a detailed, linguistic analysis which focused on a range of discursive features and strategies suggested by Fairclough (2003) and van Leeuwen (2008). These include semantic relations, collocations, discursive strategies such as presupposition, as well as value and bridging assumptions (Fairclough, 2003), which influence the ways in which certain concepts are represented. Van Leeuwen’s social actor and action networks were incorporated in order to investigate the representation of animal agency and passivization within noun phrases and clauses (van Leeuwen, 2008).

#### 4.1. Social actor network

Within van Leeuwen’s actor network framework, the activation of entities is seen as being linguistically constructed in a number of different ways. Entities are activated and therefore shown to have agency in situations by representing them as “the active, dynamic forces in an activity” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 33). This is foregrounded through *participation*; in other words through the placing of the participant role of agent as the subject of a main clause and the affected participant as the direct object. Therefore, other ways of grammatically indexing the actions of entities, such as the use of embedded, passive voice participle clauses, are seen as backgrounding agency to some degree. Activation can also be grammatically signified through *circumstantialization*; that is, the use of passive voice clauses that include the agent within prepositional phrases using *by* and *from*.

On the other hand, according to van Leeuwen, the primary mechanism for the passivation of entities is *subjection*, whereby entities are clearly positioned as the affected participant of an agent’s verb in a clause. Van Leeuwen details how passivation can also be performed through the use of adjectival pre-modification (see Ex. 1).

*Example 1: Wildlife management (author’s example)*

In Example 1, the entity referenced in the pre-modifying adjective (wildlife in this case) is seen as being impacted by the action or process denoted by the head noun. Similarly, *possessivization* for van Leeuwen passivates entities through placing them as post-modifiers to nominalizations (Ex. 2). In such cases, it is the entity embedded within the post-modifying structure that is represented as impacted by the entity denoted by the head of the phrase.

*Example 2: The use of wildlife (author's example)*

Alternatively, van Leeuwen suggests that the representation of entities can be significantly affected through depersonalizing them. More specifically, this effect can be performed through the use of language that *abstracts* and *objectivizes*. Entities are abstracted when they are represented in terms of a particular quality or characteristic (2008, p. 46), while a form of *objectivation* relevant to the present study is *somatization*, which occurs when social actors are metonymically represented in terms of parts of their body.

## 4.2. Social action network

The linguistic construction and emphasis of relative degrees of agency in entities can also be examined through analyzing how their actions are portrayed. For example, actions can be either activated or deactivated (passivated). Van Leeuwen draws heavily on Halliday's transitivity theory to show how verbs can be categorized in terms of material, relational, verbal, existential, and mental processes (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Each of these process types represents entities in terms of varying degrees of agency. Material processes signal the greatest level of agency that can be associated with an entity. Other process types as well as material processes without a clear agent deactivate the agency of actions (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 111). Other ways that actions can be deactivated or passivated are through *objectivation* and *descriptivization*. When actions are objectivated, they are constructed as nominalizations or process nouns taking the function of subject or object in clauses (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 63). Actions are deactivated through *descriptivization* when they are represented as relatively permanent features of entities rather than dynamic processes (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 65). As seen in Example 3, this is often achieved through pre-modification.

*Example 3: A predatory species (author's example)*

## 4.3. Coding and categorization of the results

The identified discourse fragments were coded in terms of both their linguistic structure and what they communicate. For example, some discursive features represent wild animals as either activated or passivated and were coded accordingly. The coded discursive features



or *discourse fragments* were grouped into discursive themes (sub-categories), comprising the overall discourse strand, which itself relates to wildlife management. The discursive themes identified were then assigned descriptive titles.

## 5. Results

The analysis of the discursive structures within Naturvårdsverket's report revealed the presence of a constellation of subordinate discursive themes comprising an overall discourse strand. Within this constellation, each discursive theme does not simply contribute to and construct the narrative structure of the overall discourse strand, but also establishes the ideational foundations for the existence of the next discursive theme. In the constellation, the cumulative effect of the interactions of their ideational content advances an overall discourse position. In this case, this discursively constructed stance is strongly anthropocentric and constructs wild animals as the ecologically passive and necessarily impacted objects of exploitative actions, but also as problematic, and representing value only as a sustainable resource. The entailment of this representation is that wild animals are viewed as pests unless objectified and utilized in any way that can bring immediate and tangible benefits to people.

In addition to the overall discursive themes, the analysis also revealed statements that suggest less exploitative relationships with wildlife. However, in each case, as shall be demonstrated, these positions are either backgrounded or, under close ecolinguistic analysis, can be seen as drawing from the same ideological substrate of commodification and resourcification.

Overall, the following five dominant discursive themes comprising the constellation were identified:

- Discursive theme 1: Wild animals are both ecologically passive and the necessarily passivated entities of human actions.
- Discursive theme 2: Wild animals are damaging to human enterprises.
- Discursive theme 3: Wild animal numbers need to be reduced through hunting.
- Discursive theme 4: Wild animals are a commodity and a resource for society.
- Discursive theme 5: The utilization of wild animals is an important aspect of a sustainable society.

By applying van Leeuwen's social actor and social action networks, it can be demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of discursive features that relate to wild animals construct them as the necessary object of human actions (passivization). 86% of the separate representations of wild animals represent them in this way, with the remaining 14% portraying wild animals as having agency. Of this 14%, only 36% are positive, neutral, or relate to ecological importance, with 64% constructing wild animals as engaging in behaviors that are destructive to society. When viewed overall, only 5.1% of the discursive

structures relating to wild animals feature them as agential and engaging in behaviors that might be considered either positive or neutral, with the other 94.9% of instances representing them as either (a) entities that engage in destructive behaviors or (b) as those which are necessarily impacted by the actions of people.

## 6. Analysis of the discursive themes

### 6.1. Discursive theme 1

According to this discursive theme, wild animals are ecologically passive as well as being the passivated entities of human actions. A dominant way in which this latter representation is created in the report is by featuring animals as the affected entity (or semantic patient) within passive voice clauses. The present simple verb tense is included within independent clauses and elided in dependent clauses. The use of this verb tense in addition to the passive voice in independent clauses (Ex. 4) as well as finite and non-finite dependent clauses (Ex. 5) creates a normative thrust, advancing the idea that their control is just the way things are rather than actions which might be questioned.

*Example 4: the wildlife species that are naturally present in Sweden **are sustained** in long-term viable populations (Lines 24-25)*

*Example 5: Other wildlife **held in captivity** (Line 247)*

On the other hand, wild animals are represented as ecologically passive through the backgrounding of their ecological agency. The report contains just one mention of wild animals' beneficial agency in ecological processes (Ex. 6).

*Example 6: Identify values of ecosystem services provided by wildlife. This includes, for example, wildlife and hunting experiences, and **wildlife's structuring effects on ecosystems that benefit humans**. (Lines 328-330)*

Example 6 is an instance of van Leeuwen's concept of *descriptivization*, that is, the use of linguistic features as modifiers that represent actions as characteristics of entities. Therefore, although the "services" and "effects" that wild animals are seen to bring to ecosystems are those that structure them, suggesting a degree of agency in the creation of the foundational conditions for other life to thrive, this agency is linguistically deactivated through its representation as a relatively permanent characteristic of wildlife and their effects rather than specific actions.

However, the representation of wild animals as being both passivated by human actions but also ecologically passive is to a much greater extent connected to their removal and exploitation through hunting and the representation of wildlife as a resource respectively. Indeed, this first discursive theme can be understood as a strong connecting and enabling

theme that manifests as deeply entangled with all of the other discursive themes present in the report. It is, therefore, further addressed in each.

## 6.2. Discursive theme 2

This discursive theme constructs wild animals as destructive and as a problem for society. More specifically, wildlife are represented as engaging in behaviors that cause damage to human enterprises. The most frequent way in which wild animals are agentialized in terms of problematic behaviors is through *participation*, whereby they are given maximum responsible agency for destructive actions by being represented in material processes as subject agents impacting affected participants that pertain to human interests (eight occurrences).

*Example 7: Wildlife **causes damages to reindeer husbandry** (Lines 15-16)*

This pattern is used only twice to represent wild animal actions as neither positive nor negative.

*Example 8: Wildlife **affects** various stakeholders in society. (Line 166)*

In another example, through using this pattern, threatened, predatory animals such as Eurasian lynx and wolves are also indirectly, through their mere presence, linguistically featured as problematic agents (Ex. 9).

*Example 9: the presence of large carnivores **affects the prerequisites** for hunting and rural life. (Lines 17-18)*

Wild animal agency is also frequently indicated, though slightly de-emphasized, through *circumstantialization* by representing problematic animal behaviors within dependent, and embedded, passive voice clauses with an included agent in a *by* fronted prepositional phrase (eight occurrences).

*Example 10: We want to develop acceptance thresholds for damages **caused by wildlife** to rural enterprises and industries (Lines 343-345)*

The linguistic and discursive construction of wild animals as a problem for society is not only performed through the use of syntax but also through modality. The clauses constructing wild animals as problematic to society, without exception, employ epistemic modality to strengthen these claims (Ex. 11).

*Example 11: (In some contexts) [w]ildlife (can) (sometimes) **cause[s]** damages to reindeer*

*husbandry (Lines 15-16)*

This discursive feature essentializes wild animals as a problem by representing this notion as an unquestioned fact. This form of modality is constructed here through the use of bald statements in the present simple verb tense. None of the references to wild animals causing these problems for society employ features (provided in brackets) that would reduce the strength of these claims, such as modal auxiliary verbs to communicate probability, possibility or uncertainty, or frequency adverbs to suggest that these problems might vary from time to time or season to season. Neither do they use other verb tenses, such as the present perfect to suggest that it has occurred but may not always be an essential characteristic of these species.

The problematization of wild animals is enabled through their portrayal as invulnerable and as entities that lack their own survival needs. Indeed, a particularly striking feature of the report is the complete lack of any instances of wild animals being constructed as the objects of concern through being featured as the affected participant of damaging actions that happen to them as a result of human agency. Van Dijk (1993) uses the concept of *ideological squaring* to refer to the use of lexical resources in order to construct two groups very differently. In Naturvårdsverket's report, we see a form of *ideological squaring* played out in its transitivity patterns. As we have seen, wild animals are overwhelmingly constructed as the agents of the action of causing damage to human enterprises. Conversely, what we might expect to see, but which is not present, are clauses in which wild animals, especially threatened species, such as wolves, lynx, and wolverines, are represented syntactically as vulnerable entities that are impacted by the actions of society (roadbuilding, traffic, forestry practices, poaching, etc.). Thus, a clear asymmetry exists in terms of the value that is ascribed to wild animals and human enterprises.

### 6.3. Discursive theme 3

This theme contributes to the discursive constellation by advancing the idea that wild animals need to be strictly controlled through regulating and reducing their numbers. This notion appears as a self-evident truth when viewed against the background laid out by the previous discursive theme. Indeed, presenting environmental situations as problems is often done in order to suggest the need for particular solutions that serve particular interests (Baskin, 2015, p. 13). The proposed solution in this case is to call for the strict control of the numbers of many predatory as well as herbivorous species. The particular interests that this serves will be addressed later in this paper. The need for the strict control of wild animal numbers is a dominant theme running through the report and manifests linguistically in terms of the extremely frequent use of verbs and nominalizations relating to the “management” and control of wild animals. For example, a discursive feature contributing to this theme is the placement of words denoting wild animals as the objects of infinitive verbs such as *manage* and *hunt* within post-modifiers.

*Example 12: the best way **to manage them** (Line 18)*

It is important at this early stage to gain an understanding of what the concept of “management” means or can include for Naturvårdsverket. At several points in the report, by identifying examples of *bridging assumption* (Fairclough, 2003), close analysis of the discourse around the use of the noun phrase *wildlife management* indicates that the intended meaning of *management* can be understood to center around a very particular interpretation of the word. For instance, in Example 13, the concept of *bridging assumption* can be seen to function through the use of the phrase *wildlife management* in line 236 to refer back to two references to *hunting seasons*. The noun phrase *hunting seasons* is first used to topicalize the main theme of the paragraph in line 231 and appears again in line 233.

*Example 13:***231: HUNTING SEASONS**

232: *As a part of the regionalization, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency proposes*

233: *that decisions about the general **hunting seasons** should be reassigned from the*

234: *Government to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency or, in some cases, to the*

235: *County Administrative Boards. Such an arrangement increases the possibility to adapt*

236: **wildlife management** *to regional and local conditions.*

Thus, *wildlife management* is being used as either a synonym for hunting or as a superordinate term that includes hunting as an essential element. This close association and interplay between the two concepts is repeated in other sections of the report (see Ex. 14). Furthermore, the concept of licensed hunting is appraised positively and indeed promoted throughout the report. For instance, the nominalization of the verb “to hunt” (*hunting*) is featured extensively and is used 140 times in ways that evaluate the practice either positively or in a neutral fashion.

The nominalizations *hunting* and *management* also represent wild animals as passivated, as nominalizations of clausal processes often presuppose not only the notion of an agent performing an action but also a patient impacted by that action. The nominalized noun *management* has the effect of representing wild animals as passivated in two additional and syntactic ways. Firstly, wild animals are passivated in the report through *possessivization*, constructed here through the use of three instances of the nominalization of the verb *to manage* followed by the nouns *species* or *ungulates* within a prepositional phrase post-modifier.

*Example 14: The strategy focuses on **management of the species** that we manage through hunting — which can be referred to as “game species” or “hunnable wildlife”. (Lines 458-460)*

Here, the entity within the post-modifying prepositional phrase is seen as being the patient of the process suggested by the nominalized head noun *management*. However, very much more numerous (62 instances) is the use of the noun phrase *wildlife management*, which

linguistically passivates wild animals through adjectival pre-modification (van Leeuwen, 2008). For instance, in Example 15, wild animals are passivated by being placed as a pre-modifier to the nominalization of the verb *manage*.

*Example 15: A **wildlife management** in balance allows everyone to experience the values of wildlife. (Line 53)*

In addition to producing the effect of representing wildlife as passivated, the phrase functions in a similar fashion to existential presupposition, in this case normalizing their destruction. For example, in the case of *wildlife management*, our interest is not in the speaker's uncontroversial presupposition that the concept of wildlife management exists, but rather the linguistically displayed assumption that a wide range of wildlife species need to be managed and therefore potentially hunted rather than using non-lethal methods for mitigating problems or allowing for the natural rewilding of ecosystems.

*Example 16: **Wildlife management** needs to manage species from an ecosystem perspective to a larger extent than today, in order to better cope with, for example, damages caused by multiple ungulate species. (Lines 120-123)*

In Example 16, for instance, the concept of wildlife management is taken as being beyond question, while what is being directly asserted is how this management should take place. The entailments of this representation are that society need not find ways to live in coexistence with nature and that the natural world no longer has the agency to self-regulate. Therefore, a further entailment is that nature cannot function without human control and domination. Another example of the presupposed need for the lethal control of wild animals can be seen in Example 17, regarding threatened wolverines.

*Example 17: [T]he Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has decided on regulations for the County Administrative Boards' decisions about **licensed wolverine hunting**, (Lines 421-423)*

Again, wolverine hunting is advanced as uncontroversial through its placement within a noun phrase and is therefore treated as a given rather than being directly asserted and justified. The only direct causal reference made to attempt to justify this policy is one reference to impacts on reindeer herding by wildlife, as wolverines are known to prey upon semi-domesticated reindeer (Persson, 2003, p. 10). The need for such forms of "management" is not only evaluated positively and presupposed as obvious, but also frequently advanced as necessary through the presence and combination of a variety of discourse features, such as the use of the verb *manage* together with modal passive constructions.

*Example 18: Wildlife **must be managed** sustainably, (Lines 26-27)*

The notion that the licensed hunting of predatory animals is the solution to the problems that they cause rather than promoting tolerance or non-lethal methods of control and mitigation is also advanced through the use of modal verbs of obligation and necessity in statements calling for regulations to be changed to allow not only more hunting but also the hunting of more species.

*Example 19: The Hunting Regulation **should** be changed to enable licensed seal hunting (Line 273)*

The use of such modal verbs is an example of deontic modality. In this case, this type of modality results in bald, normative statements that advance the apparent need to control the numbers of wild animals, while also not allowing for the possibility of establishing rewilded land free from strict control and management. A strong discursive element contributing to this theme, therefore, is the backgrounding of non-lethal methods while at the same time normalizing and naturalizing licenced hunting as the solution for mitigating the negative effects of wild animals, including rare predatory species.

#### 6.4. Discursive theme 4

This discursive theme constructs wild animals as a resource or commodity for human utility. Here we see an interaction between the themes as the strict control of wild animal numbers through licensed recreational hunting not only solves the problem of the damage caused by animals, but also produces the concept of instrumental value from wildlife. The representation of wildlife as a commodity is performed most directly through the use of the noun *resource* within relational processes that employ verbs such as *represent* or the verb *to be*. The noun *resource* is used to refer to wild animals as value participants in relational processes, both within independent clauses (Ex. 20) and in terms of head nouns within noun phrases post-modified by embedded dependent clauses (Ex. 21).

*Example 20: They (wildlife) represent a resource (Line 5)*

*Example 21: Society needs to find ways to both make use of **the resource that wildlife represents** (Lines 19-20)*

The relative frequency of this representation (ten occurrences) can also be understood as an example of the use of overlexicalization, employed here in the service of the ideological work of reframing wildlife as a resource for society. Contributing to this portrayal is the modal character of these relational process clauses. Every clause displays epistemic modality, with each statement making unmitigated assertions about the status of wildlife as a resource. Again, this epistemic modality is also created through the use of the present

simple tense, which contributes to the essentialization of wild animals as a resource by representing this attribution as a permanent characteristic.

*Example 22: They (can) (sometimes) **represent a resource** that is used to the benefit and enjoyment of (some communities) many people, (Line 5)*

The use of this combination of discursive features is another example of how the theme of passivization is intimately entangled with other discursive themes. For example, the concepts of both passivization and resourcification can be seen in how wild animals are represented as passive entities within noun phrases as signifiers that usually denote objects rather than living beings. As can be seen in Example 22, while wild animals are passivated and abstracted through their representation as material resources, their potential for agency or subjecthood is also simultaneously deactivated through featuring them as participants within relational rather than material or mental processes. The combination of these discursive features enables their portrayal as inert objects rather than living beings that engage in ecologically significant behaviors.

The interplay between the representations created by these discursive features is an example of how the interactions between discursive elements occur not only in terms of discursive themes and strands, but also more concretely at the level of discourse fragments. Another example of this form of entanglement is the presence of the transitive verb *to use* relating to wild animals as patients in passive voice, embedded, finite clauses (Ex. 23) and non-finite, to infinitive clauses (Ex. 24). The latter are found within a range of larger grammatical structures, such as adjective complements. The surrounding grammatical and semantic elements, such as modal verbs of necessity and words denoting possibility, positively evaluate the exploitative actions denoted by the clausal elements as forms of recreation. All instances of these structures relate to wild animals as either the elided or linguistically present, affected participant of a transitive verb in each case, and therefore syntactically as entities that are passivated by human actions. At the same time, the presence of instrumentalizing verbs in these structures contributes to the theme of commodification within the same discourse fragments.

*Example 23: They represent a resource **that is used** to the benefit and enjoyment of many people, (Lines 5-6)*

*Example 24: It must be possible **to use wildlife** (Line 61)*

Similarly, the presence of *possessivization* performed through the frequent nominalization of the verb *to use* in noun phrases with prepositional phrase post-modifiers containing references to wild animals both linguistically passivates them and normalizes their resourcification.

The concept of *using* wildlife also manifests in the report as an example of *overlexicalization* (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 37-38). For example, the report contains a



disproportionately high frequency of lexis and collocations that normalize and naturalize the notion that wild animals' continued existence in nature is dependent upon their utility and the extent to which they should be related to as a commodity that can be owned and used. Overlexicalization associated with the concept of extrinsic value is constructed through the frequent presence of collocations built around the noun *use* (21 occurrences), of which the *sustainable use of wildlife* occurs 17 times. In addition, the noun *use* with the elided prepositional phrase *of wildlife* occurred two times, while the verbal construction *to use wildlife* occurs three times.

The high frequency with which the verb *to use* and its nominalization are placed as collocates in close proximity to the noun phrase *wildlife*, either as verbs acting on objects, or head nouns with post-modifying prepositional phrases, has the potential to create a strong association between the notion of wildlife and the concept of instrumental value and utility. This semantic prosody results in the linguistic suppression (Machin & Mayr, 2012) of the ecocentric concepts of inherent or ecological worth, again advancing the idea that, as a resource, wildlife require the concept of extrinsic value to justify their continued existence in nature. In total, there are forty-three individual examples of lexis that contribute to this representation, not including the many positive references to hunting and the need for people to have the “opportunity” to hunt. By means of a comparison, the lexical attention given to non-exploitative interactions with wild animals amounts to only eight instances. Here we see references to “nature” or “other” “experiences”, or outdoor recreation and tourism. Of these, only four of the examples of lexis refer to informal and potentially personal experiences with wild animals.

This overall discursive theme is, therefore, not only indicated by the textual presence of particular discursive features, but also their absence. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 39) make the case that what is ideologically important is not only that which is included in textual representation, but also what one might expect to be included but is omitted. Indeed, as we have seen, the report makes very few references to wild animals' ecological functions in nature, especially when it comes to those that cannot be directly and tangibly linked to human benefits.

We have also seen how the report makes few references to interactions with wild animals that involve non-exploitative actions or an appreciation of their inherent worth. When these are included, they are treated as just one example of many forms of commodification and utilization. For instance, *nature experiences*, *wildlife tourism*, *outdoor recreation*, and *the conservation of biodiversity* are used as suggestions for some of the many ways in which society can appreciate and make use of wildlife. However, a closer analysis of the larger discursive structures within which these noun phrases are presented reveals the frequent use of these phrases as co-hyponyms to exploitative uses of wild animals, advancing a sense of equivalence between exploitative and non-exploitative interactions. Thus, according to Naturvårdsverket's report, wild animals are considered an ethics-free resource, which can and indeed should be utilized in either benevolent or destructive ways.

Similarly, in two cases, the report uses language that might be interpreted as expressing

an appreciation of the role of wild animals in ecosystems. However, ecolinguistic analysis reveals an anthropocentric motivation. For instance, in Example 12, we previously saw a mention of “wildlife’s structuring effects on ecosystems”. However, when the whole noun phrase is viewed as a single structure, it can be seen that the post-modifying noun *ecosystems* is itself post-modified through the use of a defining relative clause, relating these effects to humans. Thus, in this report, wild animals can only rid themselves of their destructive framing and be useful to humans by structuring the specific ecosystems that provide tangible benefits to humans rather than a wider nature. Therefore, any benefits they might confer to ecosystems that are currently not known to directly benefit humans would, according to this position, be considered worthless. Thus, rather than providing a clear counter discursive theme to that which constructs wild animal behaviors as destructive to human affairs and representing minimal ecological value in ecosystems, this is a discursive position that views nature as valuable only when it can be seen as a resource that directly serves human ends. This is a strongly anthropocentric position aligned to the economic metaphors of natural capital and ecosystem services, which highlight the instrumental value of nature, constructing it as capital that produces a flow of dividends directly related to human utility (Coffey, 2016; Sullivan, 2014).

Example 25 also represents an example of this position, with the pre-modifying adjective *valuable* working in the same way as the previous post-modifier to define particular subsets of nature as valuable, but only in the sense that they have demonstrable value to humans.

*Example 25: Measures for **valuable nature** should be reallocated to a separate appropriation (Lines 289-290)*

Therefore, a key element to this discursive theme is that which advances the idea that nature is primarily a resource that is here only to provide us with tangible benefits and services rather than having its own ends or those of facilitating the ecological systems upon which all life depends.

Contributing to the overall discursive theme of *wildlife as resource* is the idea that wildlife are entities that are owned. One way in which this ownership is constructed is through the use of possessive determiners.

*Example 26: **Our wildlife populations** are a renewable natural resource (Line 12)*

The concept of ownership is also advanced through the use of the pre-modifying adjectives *shared* and *common*.

*Example 27: [We have a] **SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SHARED RESOURCE** (Line 13)*

As owned commodities, wild animals can easily be framed as financial concerns and investments as part of a larger framing of nature as an economic commodity. In other words, wild animals are represented as something that one has a financial interest in. Through representing people who have a relationship with wildlife as “stakeholders” (14 occurrences), wild animals are framed as a financial interest and as the passive object of this relationship.

Another discursive feature in the report that contributes to the essentialization of wild animals as a resource for human utility is the use of a type of grammatical metaphor. Fairclough interprets Michael Halliday’s concept of grammatical metaphor and non-congruent grammatical representations as relating not only to the portrayal of clausal processes as grammatical entities, but also the representation of events and happenings through the use of non-typical process types (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 143-144). For instance, Example 28 contains what might be considered material processes containing agents *providing* human beneficiaries with their body parts and other *ecosystem services*. However, these representations can be considered non-congruent as wild animals are not performing actions in these representations. Rather, wild animals are these services and benefits, a situation that would congruently be represented through the use of relational processes.

*Example 28: They **provide** us with opportunities for nature experiences, hunting and access to game meat (Lines 13-14)*

As indicated above, the report constructs wild animals as a resource by establishing their entertainment value as hunted quarry. The main way that this framing is achieved is through *value assumptions* (Fairclough, 2003), performed through the use of a range of discursive features. For instance, the hunting of wildlife in protected areas is evaluated positively several times through the use of the noun *opportunities* followed by a complex noun phrase containing a post-modifier featuring the gerund noun *hunting*. Indeed, the report states that Naturvårdsverket will *clarify* and thus permit the *opportunities* for this exploitation of wild animals within protected areas. Here, the gerund noun *hunting* and infinitive verb *to hunt* are evaluated as desirable because they follow the noun *opportunities*, which is usually associated with the possibility of gaining something positive and of value. *Value assumptions*, thus, contribute to the construction and naturalization of wild animals as a resource for “hunting experiences”. These hunting experiences are portrayed as generating additional resource value from wildlife through the use of objectivation (somatization) (van Leeuwen, 2008), performed through references to wild animals in terms of body part metonyms (11 occurrences).

Also in line with van Leeuwen’s action network, the notion of wild animals as living, agential beings is abstracted away through representing them in terms of the concept of human-related valuation. An explicit example of this can be seen in the use of the noun *wildlife* within a post-modifier to the head noun *values*.

*Example 29: Opinions regarding **the values of wildlife** and the best way to manage them vary depending on people's interests and values. (Lines 18-19)*

Such a move represents the animals themselves as modifiers of and thus subordinate to the values that we derive from them. Animals are further passivated but also resourcified when this noun phrase is placed as the object of transitive verbs relating to instrumentalizing relationships. Thus, in Naturvårdsverket's report, people are not seen as interacting with individual wild animals in relational and non-exploitative ways that are represented as conferring aesthetic, mental or spiritual benefits. Instead, people engage with wild animals in terms of drawing on the abstract and relativistic concept of the *values* they ascribe to them.

## 6.5. Discursive theme 5

This theme constructs the use of wild animals as a key pathway to achieving sustainability. It is entangled with and enabled by the previous themes that establish wildlife as the affected entity of human actions and as an ethics-free resource or commodity to be used. Indeed, the representation of wild animals as a resource is either constructed directly or in more indirect ways, by inference, through portraying them as an aspect of sustainability, a discourse that relates to the prudent use of resources.

This theme is in part characterized by the high frequency with which the utilization and consumption of wild animals is framed as a sustainable practice by situating so-called *game* meat as an ecologically friendly option compared to that which is obtained from animal agriculture. This discursive positioning therefore suppresses the notion that society could eat less meat, transition towards a plant-based food system, or indeed that this choice of obtaining meat is severely limited by the potentially devastating impact on wildlife numbers that would occur if large sections of society chose to eat this way.

This theme is further constructed through the use of overlexicalization to construct and emphasize a strong association between the collocates *sustainable*, *use*, and *wildlife*, as well as *renewable* and *resource*. For example, the text features a marked repetition of the use of these collocations, which function to emphasize the point that we should see wild animals as resources within a sustainability framing. The noun phrase *the sustainable use of wildlife* occurs seventeen times in the report. In addition, there are single occurrences of the verbal structure *use wildlife sustainably* and the phrases *a renewable resource* and *natural resource* as subject complements that refer back to wild animals. The noun phrase *the sustainable use of wildlife* occurs so often as to form a local collocation. Thus, its constituent elements, *sustainable*, *use* and *wildlife*, are, through their close proximity, subject to the effects of semantic prosody, with a resource-based, instrumental perspective of wild animals being infused with the positive and green associations connected to the concept of sustainability.

This collocation is used nine times in the report as an existential presupposition and a further five times with the zero article. Its use as an existential presupposition advances as

a given the idea that environmental management based on a perspective that views all other beings as instrumental to our uses can be sustainable in the long-term. Additionally, there are seven occurrences of value assumptions whereby the phrase *the sustainable use of wildlife* is appraised positively through being placed as the object of the verb *to promote*. The following sentence further contributes to this discursive theme by suggesting that an exploitative relationship with wild animals is sustainable if carried out efficiently.

*Example 30: Hunting, trading, distribution and processing of game meat, as well as other wildlife products, should be set up so that [.....] as much as possible from the animal comes to use. (Lines 74-76)*

## 7. Discussion

As we have seen, discourses can interact and affect each other with discursive effects at both the more abstract discourse level (Fairclough, 2003) and at the more concrete level of the discourse fragment (Jäger & Maier, 2015, p. 122). Similarly, the main finding of this study is the presence of a complex of discursive themes within which each plays its part to contribute to an overall construction of wild animals as entities that are a threat to human affairs, and which are only able to transcend this portrayal through being linguistically constructed as a sustainable commodity.

This constellation of discursive themes aligns to some degree with Crist's discovery of a *discursive knot* that is comprised of a series of discourses that function together to situate the human within the natural environment, demolish the notion of a separate, agential nature existing outside of human culture, and advance a call for more rather than less domination of the living world (Crist, 2019). The discourses in Crist's *discursive knot* are informed by humanities reflections on an Anthropocene condition, whereas the discursive constellation highlighted in Naturvårdsverket's report is motivated by a pragmatic, resource-based managerialism based on short-term benefits to human beings. However, they both downplay nature's agency in ecological systems as well as the notion of a sovereign nature able to exist without being subsumed within and given legitimacy as an aspect of human culture. While Crist's knot functions at the more abstract level of discourses, this study shows how the concept can also manifest in terms of both discursive themes within a document and more concrete interactions between discourse fragments.

Naturvårdsverket's report contains a wide range of discursive features that contribute to each discursive theme and therefore the overall constellation of themes. Firstly, separate linguistic features construct the notion that wild animals are associated with problems while simultaneously representing both herbivorous and predatory animals as otherwise ecologically passive by backgrounding or omitting their ecological agency and beneficial actions in nature. For example, material processes and transitivity patterns represent wild animals as disposable others, engaging in damaging behaviors towards valuable human enterprises. These discursive representations of wild animals also help to keep in place the

notion that predatory animals are only destructive to human affairs. Thus, these problems are foregrounded in the report while the potential ecological, aesthetic, and non-violent, recreational benefits that healthy populations of predators and herbivores would entail are linguistically backgrounded.

This problematization, therefore, rhetorically sets up the need for a solution, which is to increase the overall amount of hunting as well as the number of species that can be hunted. Thus, both the problem and solution become an opportunity for those who would like fewer hunting restrictions. This has materialized recently (2023) in the issuing of licenses for the destruction through hunting of 20% of Sweden's population of brown bears, and the hunting of 201 lynx. Indeed, this move further facilitates the demands of hunting organizations through eliminating the predators that would otherwise naturally control the numbers of the herbivores that are implicated in traffic accidents, thus maintaining enough deer and elk, etc., to be considered a problem.

The justification of the intensive control and utilization of wild animals is also supported by the discursive theme that portrays them as both a physical resource and abstract values that are to be accessed by society. This notion is constructed in the report through the use of relational process types, noun phrases, and head nouns denoting abstract concepts and notions of value as well as metonymical references. These “values of wildlife” are to be drawn on in terms of the entertainment and food that come about through increased “opportunities” for hunting. This is indexed through the frequent use of value assumptions that advance exploitative activities towards wild animals as either uncontroversial givens or opportunities that should be made available to society at large. In turn, this concept is supported by establishing the utilization of wild animals by referring to them in terms of the results of hunting; that is, as wildlife products and other metonyms. Thus, the discursive constellation aligns strongly with the metaphors of natural capital and ecosystem services. Indeed, in Naturvårdsverket's report, it is the “values of wildlife” that can be easily connected to the instrumental uses of animals that feature prominently in the discursive constellation, while those that relate to non-exploitative engagements are linguistically backgrounded.

Many of the linguistic features that represent wild animals as a resource align with those discovered by both Stibbe (2012) and Goatly (2017). Specifically, in Naturvårdsverket's report, these features relate to the representation of wild animals as both resources and the affected entities of human utilization in clauses and noun phrases, and as backgrounded and passivated entities positioned as modifiers to noun phrases. This study also endorses Goatly's findings of the linguistic construction of wild animals as agential through the use of grammatical metaphor as services that they “provide” and “contribute”.

Within the constellation of discursive themes, the theme of *wildlife as resource* both facilitates and is itself enabled by the construction of wildlife and their body parts as a key aspect of a society striving to meet its sustainability goals. Furthermore, the discursive representation of wildlife as a sustainable resource is facilitated and promoted through their portrayal as both passive objects and abstract values, such as entertainment, which should

be utilized by society as a renewable resource.

Fairclough (2003, pp. 127-131) makes the point that discourses can both draw upon other discourses and form new discursive formations by employing the language and concepts of another but using them differently. In utilizing particular discourse features that passivate, objectify, and problematize wild animals, while also heavily drawing on the concept of sustainability, Naturvårdsverket's report merges the discourse of sustainable development with that of wildlife management in order to justify the intensive hunting and resourcification of Swedish wildlife.

This discursive position can be understood as an extreme example of Cielemečka and Daigle's (2019) critique of the sustainability discourses of environmental management. Such discourses, they suggest, construct sustainability as the need to seek access to natural resources for future generations of humans. These authors criticize the narrow human supremacism inherent in this understanding of sustainability and draw on Stacy Alaimo (2010), Claire Colebrook (2014), and Donna Haraway (2015, 2016) to postulate a feminist, posthuman conceptualization of sustainability that views "the human being as radically entangled in the world with nonhuman others". Thus, in this view of sustainability, the notion of "future generations" includes nonhuman animals, plants, and ecosystems (Cielemečka & Daigle, 2019, p. 72). Therefore, in stark contrast to the anthropocentric and objectifying discursive position established in Naturvårdsverket's report, this notion of sustainability does not background or ignore the existence of entities and their life-sustaining effects on ecosystems on which we depend. Indeed, for Plumwood (2006, p. 116), orientations that not only deny dependence on nature's agency but also actively weaken the condition of the living world are incompatible with the concept of a genuinely sustainable relationship with the natural world.

## 8. Conclusion

Overall, the discursive constellation highlighted in this study corresponds to sustainability discourses that metaphorically view nature as both a system of *natural capital* and dividends that flow from it. The findings also suggest that the underlying understanding of wildlife within the Swedish government's most important environmental agency is strongly anthropocentric and overwhelmingly constructs wild animals as agential only insofar as they are problematic. At the same time, their ecological agency is backgrounded and their worth is understood primarily in terms of being providers of food, products, or entertainment through hunting. Crucially, this position would seem to be largely incompatible with the need for the protection of large areas within which natural processes can proceed unhindered by human control and runs contrary to the position that might be expected from an organization that is dedicated to the protection of the natural world. Moreover, by simultaneously functioning as a system of discursive themes that produces state-sanctioned forms of knowledge communicated by those with authority over what counts as true, the discursive constellation functions as a *regime of truth* (Foucault,

2019/1975, p. 23; 1977, p. 13), inhibiting other, relational, non-exploitative and non-anthropocentric ways of relating to the natural world, such as respect, tolerance, and care. In addition to these empirical findings, this study has methodological implications for ecolinguists as it demonstrates that the combination of a fine-grained analysis of discursive features in conjunction with a Foucauldian discourse analysis can reveal important insights about how discursive themes and fragments can combine and interact to advance particular ways of thinking about and acting towards nature.

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