

**Book Review*****Framing Farming: Communication Strategies for Animal Rights*****Carrie P. Freeman****(2014, Brill | Rodopi; ISBN: 978-90-420-3892-9)****Reviewed by****Diego L. Forte****University of Buenos Aires, Argentina****E-mail: [dforte@filo.uba.ar](mailto:dforte@filo.uba.ar)**

How do activists convince meat eaters to stop eating meat? As Carrie Freeman mentions, this situation poses the same problem every anti-hegemonic discourse must face: being more pragmatic/utilitarian or staying more idealistic/radical? This means, gaining adherents by softening principles or staying true to ideals with the consequent risk of not reaching a wide range.

In *Framing Farming* the plot is marked by the ‘animal rights’/‘animal welfare’ dualism that goes through the entire book, stating two poles between which the strategies adopted by animal rights organizations shift to capture their audience.

It is often said that animal welfare advocates argue for bigger cages whereas animal rights advocates do it for empty cages. And it is also said that whether one adopts an animal rights or an animal welfare perspective, animal protection seems to be at the root. But how much can you bend your ideology in order to get people quit their alimentary habits? And what does it mean to stop eating meat? Does every meat eater that quits do it for ethical reasons? Why do they quit? All these questions have been formulated by animal rights organizations and they have found different answers for them, all related to different views of the world and different paths they are willing to take to get things changed. And Freeman looks into these discourses bringing us the back stage and the detailed ideology behind these organizations.

The book adopts an animal rights perspective, although the author considers, as many theoreticians, animal rights and animal welfare as different points on a continuum that runs from animal liberation at one end, to animal exploitation at the other. This long-term discussion is brought back by Freeman to graph the shifting of strategies in each case.

Starting from these polarities, the book proposes an analysis of the use of communication resources the five largest animal rights organizations in the United States make to approach their audience: People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Farm Sanctuary, Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), Compassion Over Killing (COK) and Vegan Outreach.

Chapter 1 constitutes a sort of introduction in which the importance of language and discourse in shaping the way in which we perceive the world is emphasized. But also emphasized is the fact that these discourses (stories) that construct the world around us can be (and ought to be) deconstructed. In other words, if we want to change the world around us, and the social practices within, we must change the way in which we talk about them.

Besides chapter 1, the book is divided in three parts:

1. *Overview of Animal Rights, Vegetarianism, and Communication* (chapters 2-3): Freeman begins this part with a clear statement:

I believe you really cannot design effective advocacy messages until you truly understand and interrogate your own ideology, that deeper understanding of your beliefs and motivations needs to shape your surface-level rhetorical choices (p. 33).

Here, the book describes Western ideological foundations on animals, the philosophical background on the ‘Animal Rights’ vs. ‘Animal Welfare’ discussion, representations of nature, ethics and the use of other animals for food. Freeman revisits the history of animal rights movement, including activism on behalf of farmed animals, modern animal rights philosophy and the construction of human/animal dichotomy. She also introduces the relationship between meat and other forms of oppression as slavery and patriarchy.

2. *How U.S. Animal Rights Organizations Frame Food Campaign Messages* (chapters 4-7): This part analyzes the food-related advocacy materials that animal rights organizations distribute to approach the public and introduce them to vegetarianism/veganism. Advocacy materials include pamphlets on factory farming, t-shirts and bumper stickers, undercover videos of slaughterhouses, vegetarian starter guides and posters, TV and magazine advertisements and electronic materials like websites and self-produced videos.

3. *Strategic Communication Recommendations for Vegan Activism* (chapters 8-9): This part presents insights from interviews with the leaders of the five organizations: Matt Ball of Vegan Outreach, Gene Baur and Bruce Friedrich of Farm Sanctuary, Alex Hershaft of the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), Erica Meir of Compassion Over Killing (COK), and Ingrid Newkirk of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

Through the book, Freeman analyzes the ideological postulates of the five organizations, starting from the pragmatism-idealism tension and the way it influences their approaching strategies. Freeman brings us a detailed work that examines what organizations declare and what they in fact do. In order to achieve her goal, the author adopts Goffman’s framing theory (1974), what allows her to describe not just the main meanings but all significant elements activated by each frame adopted by a given organization, getting very close to the postulates of Ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015).

As mentioned before, the animal rights/animal welfare dichotomy plays a central role establishing a way of measuring the attitude of the organizations toward their campaigns: are they closer to rights or welfare? In the same sense as Goffman, Freeman mentions that the way in which something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about that something. According to this, some campaigns can be based more in moral values (more animal rights oriented) or in making people stop eating meat (more welfare oriented).

Freeman's study states that organizations diagnosed the problems to work on as: 1) the suffering of animals due to cruelty; 2) the commodification of animals into economic objects; 3) the harmfulness of animal agribusiness and animal products to humans and the environment; and 4) the needless killing and death of animals for food products. Although they include animal agribusiness and fishing industry as the ones holding the main responsibility, to a lesser extent, they also charge American consumers. These consumers were informed of the problems associated with an animal-based diet and nevertheless they continue their consumption.

*Framing Farming* presents a good case analysis. Going down the same path Ecolinguistics has taken, its main focus is the way in which we talk about the topics we talk. Again, to change the way things are, we have to change the stories behind them and the way in which we construct these stories. Freeman joins the resources used by animal rights organizations to those used by feminist and libertarian groups at different times, building the necessary bridges among anti-hegemonic discourses.

Some of the conclusions presented by Freeman evidence that activist organizations may prioritize short-term campaigns and exclude long-term critical rhetoric, so that its existence in the public discourse is marginal, seeming all the more radical. Her proposal is a blending of critical rhetoric into everyday campaigns so the main focus is not lost completely (p. 71).

The book constitutes a handbook on how to build new stories to live by. Although its linguistic analysis does not go beyond framing, it makes a diagnosis of the functioning of the resources of each organization and provides a good insight on how these new stories are constructed.

## References

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