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As Charming as a Pig: The Discursive Construction of the Relationship Between Pigs and Humans

ABSTRACT

In the past, pigs were kept near their guardians’ (owners’) homes, ate leftovers from their guardians’ kitchens and enjoyed a generally close relationship with humans. The closeness of the relationship, combined with its ultimate end in the killing of the pig, led to a sense of shame (Leach, 1964). This shame manifested itself in negative expressions about pigs within the English language, which remain to this day. However, the relationship between humans and pigs is becoming increasingly distant, with decisions affecting pigs’ lives made in the offices of agricultural industry executives far from the intensive farms on which the pigs live. The new relationship has led to the evolution of a new discourse about pigs, that of the modern pork industry. Because of its technical and scientific nature, this new discourse does not contain the explicit insults of mainstream discourse. Yet, embedded within it are a series of implicit ideological assumptions designed to justify the confinement and exploitation of pigs in high intensity farms. This paper investigates the discourses surrounding pigs in both mainstream (British) culture and the pork industry and discusses attempts to challenge these discourses.

In Victorian Britain, the relationship between people and pigs could be described as one of closeness. Pigs were an integral part of village life, living in close proximity with their guardians (owners’) and being fed on leftover food from their guardians’ kitchen and table (Malcolmson & Mastoris, 1998). However,
Leach (1964) describes how because pigs were “nearly a member of the household,” people felt “a rather special guilt.” Leach continues:

After all, sheep provide wool, cows produce milk, chickens produce eggs, but we rear pigs for the sole purpose of killing and eating them, and this is rather a shameful thing, a shame which quickly attaches to the pig itself.

(p. 51)

This shame manifested itself as a huge array of insulting expressions related to pigs, which entered the English language itself.

Now the relationship between pigs and humans is one of distance, as the relentless push for cheap pork has led to pigs’ being kept indoors in intensive conditions. With the aid of technology and machinery, a few people look after hundreds of pigs, and the only contact most people have with pigs is on the dinner plate. However, the intense negativity toward pigs within the English language remains. Because language is bound up intimately with culture, the image of the pig continues to play a part in English culture. Fairclough (2003, p. 18) points out, “cultures exist as languages, or what I shall rather call discourses.”

The first section of this article presents a brief analysis of the discourse surrounding pigs in mainstream British culture, followed by a detailed analysis of the discourse of the pork industry in the second section. The final section discusses attempts that have been made to challenge both mainstream and industry discourse.

**British Mainstream Discourse and the Pig-Human Relationship**

Examining the uses of the word, “pig,” in a corpus of contemporary English such as the British National Corpus (BNC) reveals just how widespread and negative are the constructions of pigs. The BNC consists of 100 million words extracted from a wide range of books, newspapers, television programs, magazines, and recorded everyday speech. Within the BNC is an astonishingly large range of metaphors, similes, and idioms about pigs—far more than for any other nonhuman animal. Rats, snakes, dogs, and cats do not even come close, showing how deeply the pig is entrenched in British culture. There are 62 different non-literal uses of the words, “pig,” “hog,” and “swine” in the corpus, and these are summarized in Table 1.
Even a cursory glance at this table reveals the overwhelmingly negative attitude toward pigs expressed in everyday British English. With only a few exceptions such as, “you lucky pig” and “happy as a pig in the mire,” the expressions seem to be attributions of unpleasant or negative characteristics to a third party. Examination of the context in which such expressions occur reveals presuppositions, taken-for-granted facts about the world that lie behind the expressions (Kadmon, 2000; Gazdar, 1978). Thus, “You are as fat as a pig” presupposes, and takes it to be, common knowledge that, pigs are (very) fat animals. Extracting and analyzing presuppositions is an effective way of revealing the cultural model, or in Barthes’ (1957/1972) terms, the mythology underlying linguistic usage.

Presuppositions are a particularly powerful way of building and sustaining the models on which a culture is based. The expression “as selfish as a pig” presupposes that pigs are (very) selfish, without any kind of overt statement, such as “pigs are selfish,” which could be proved wrong. As expressions are repeated in the general currency of society, the mythology of pigs as selfish creatures is perpetuated.
An expression such as “foreign pig,” of course, does not presuppose that pigs are foreign, and grammatically all sentences of the form “Adjective + Pig” do not necessarily contain such presuppositions. The grammar of the sentence in which the word, pig, is found is therefore critical when analyzing presuppositions (hence the arrangement of Table 1 according to grammatical structures).

Within the “Adjective + pig” category (column 1 of Table 1) are a range of expressions where pig refers to a “person who is improperly assuming superiority”: male chauvinist pig, patronizing pig, misogynist swine, pompous pig, self-righteous pig, self-regarding swine, and fascist pig. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that assuming superiority belongs to the cultural model of pigs, since it is not presupposed, and there is no additional evidence of expressions that contain corresponding presuppositions (such as “as patronizing as a pig” or “as misogynist as a pig”).

In the expressions in the second column of Table 1, the presupposition is not explicitly given within the sentence but is a function of the meaning of the sentence. If “She is behaving like a pig” is used to mean “She is behaving greedily,” then this presupposes that “pigs are greedy.” Because the word, greedy, is not explicitly mentioned, it is the readers/hearers of the sentence who must supply the concept of greed. This is what Fairclough (1989, p. 85) calls “gap-filling,” and it is a particularly powerful way of entrenching cultural models because hearers/readers are forced to supply negative presuppositions to interpret the sentences.

Analyzing only direct presuppositions (column 3 of Table 1) and those meaning-dependent presuppositions (column 2) where the context makes the meaning explicit, we can gain an impression of the cultural model behind the use of the word, pig, in the BNC. Of course, the BNC contains only a fraction of the many uses of the word, pig, in English, but we can get a general idea of just how negative these uses are by using the BNC as a spotlight. According to the data in the BNC, within British culture, pigs are presupposed to be ignorant, greedy, untidy, stubborn, selfish, badly behaved, and fat. In addition, they get very drunk and sick, squeal loudly when “stuck,” become happy in the “mire,” “poop” or “shit,” and have a sloppy breakfast.

While the cultural model bears little relation to actual pigs, it bears all the hallmarks of cultural models in other areas, such as racism or sexism. Members
of the dominant group base their feelings of superiority and self-worth on the supposed shortcomings of another group, “basking in the reflection a negatively constituted other” (Valentine, 1998, p. 2).

However, this is a very unstable base for self-esteem because, deep down, everyone knows that the other group does not have these shortcomings. Rather than finding a new basis for self-esteem such as co-operation and respect, the supposed shortcomings are simply trumpeted more loudly and entrenched ever more deeply in everyday language.

In Victorian times, the inferior image of pigs presumably helped provide a barrier between humans and pigs, overcoming cultural taboos against killing those who are close to us. The discourse of the pork industry could be argued equally to provide a barrier between humans and pigs, although, in this case, it is a barrier justifying not only killing pigs but also keeping them confined indoors in high intensity facilities for their whole lives.

**Pork Industry Discourse and the Pig-Human Relationship**

The discourse of the pork industry can be characterized as scientific and technical. There are, therefore, no explicit insults: Pigs never are officially described as ignorant, selfish, greedy, nasty, or filthy. Yet it is possible, within scientific and technical discourse, to insert hidden ideological assumptions that none-the-less construct pigs in a negative way. It is easy to notice the explicit insults hurled at pigs in mainstream discourse and counter them with facts about the cleanliness and sociability of pigs. However, noticing the implicit ideological assumptions in technical discourse requires deeper analysis.

This section conducts such an analysis, using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992b; Van Dijk, 1993). The analysis focuses on the standard reference manual of the pork industry, the Pork Industry Handbook (PIH, 2002), a document that both reflects and propagates pork industry discourse. According to its own publicity, the Pork Industry Handbook (PIH) is written by “more than 800 authors and reviewers,” and is used in “45 states representing about 99% of the pork production in the US” (PIH, 2003, L233). Within the information sheets that make up the PIH, lost among countless instructions for the proper raising of pork, is nothing less than the redefinition of an entire species.
The PIH (2002) states, “Since the early 1970s, the swine industry has continued to move toward specialisation, mechanisation and enclosed housing for the rearing of livestock” (p. 104). A similar statement could be made about the language of the PIH, which has become specialized and technologized (Fairclough, 1992b) to serve the goals of the industry. The goals are clear: “[T]he business of producing pork is the primary, and most frequently, the only objective” (PIH, p. 83). “The goal of the workplace is to minimize the amount of time (labor) spent on . . . each animal unit” (PIH, p. 8). Above all else, “The success of a swine enterprise is measured in terms of profit” (PIH, p. 100). To achieve these goals pigs have been linguistically re-conceptualized on a fundamental level, starting with a redefinition of the concept of their “health.”

Quotation 1:

Health is the condition of an animal with regard to the performance of its vital functions. The vital functions of the pig are reproduction and growth. They are vital because they are major contributors to the economic sustainability of the pork production enterprise. (PIH, 2002, p. 140)

Usually, vital functions refer to those bodily functions upon which life depends, such as digestion or the circulation of blood. However, in the redefinition of quotation 1, the bodily functions of the pigs are not vital to the individual animal but to the pork production enterprise. This metaphorically3 constructs the enterprise as a huge animate being whose life depends on making a profit, with pigs—rendered collectively vital but individually dispensable cells—making up this larger being.

Disease is defined in similar terms: “Disease is a major risk to farm sustainability, thus protection of herd health is a top priority” (PIH, 2002, p. 140). Note that “health” has been replaced by the term, “herd health,” leading to a situation where, “Verbally subsumed into the flock or herd, nonhumans disappear as individuals” (Dunayer, 2001, p. 140). PIH describes how designing health strategies “for herds of animals requires a very different approach than those used for individual animals” (p. 140). When pigs disappear as individuals, their individual health problems also disappear from official consideration.
Individual pigs have a function in keeping the “enterprise-being” alive, and their lives are defined narrowly in terms of this function. Linguistically, adjectival pre-modifiers are used to incorporate the function into the designation of individuals. Thus, we find nursery pig, grower pig, farrowing pig, feeder pig, finisher pig, carry-over sow, cull sow, market hog, and slaughter hog (PIH, 2002, pp. 146, 6, 83, 12, 123).

Health is measured solely in terms of ability to perform the desired function, allowing genuine health problems that do not conflict with the function to be ignored (quotations 2-4).

**Quotation 2:**

Claw injuries have been shown to be greater on total slats than on partial slats. However, the effect of claw injuries on growth rate appears to be slight. (PIH, 2002, p. 53)

**Quotation 3:**

Pigs can be subjected to very high levels of ammonia for a relatively long time with little adverse production effect. (PIH, 2002, p. 54)

**Quotation 4** [about swine flu]:

Pigs develop high fevers . . . exhibit rapid forced breathing . . . a harsh barking cough . . . pregnant animals frequently abort. Although pigs appear [italics added] to be quite ill . . . death loss is minimal. (PIH, 2002, p. 141)

In quotation 3, the irritation and respiratory problems associated with ammonia are ignored because they do not affect the growth rate. In quotation 4, despite the long list of symptoms, pigs only appear to be ill, because financial loss due to their death is minimal. According to the PIH definition of health, pigs are actually ill only when their health problems have a financial impact.

Having defined health in terms of the “performance of its [the pig’s] vital functions” (PIH, 2000, p. 140), PIH often drops the term, health, completely, subsuming it within the replacement term, performance. This can lead to macabre conclusions such as even if up to a quarter of piglets die because of disease or injury the herd still performs well and hence is healthy. This can be seen in quotation 5, which discusses the advantages of removing piglets from their mother early and giving them broad-spectrum antibiotics.
Quotation 5:

Postweaning mortality is increased (ranging up to 12% to 25%) . . . However, substantial benefits have been reported in the finishing performance. (PIH, 2002, p. 111)

Medical intervention for the sake of performance is quite different from medical intervention to save lives or reduce pain. The “Hysterectomy-derived, colostrum deprived germ free (microbe free) pigs” (PIH, 2002, p. 139) are produced by “opening the uterus and extracting the pigs by hysterectomy . . .” and then rearing them “in isolation . . . on artificial milk replacer” (PIH, p. 139). The result: “infections disease levels may be low and pig performance excellent” (PIH, p. 139).

Fortuitously for the pigs, because shivering wastes “feed energy to frictional losses that would otherwise go to growth” (PIH, 2002, p. 54), PIH recommends keeping pigs warm, although it expresses this as “optimal thermal conditions for pork production” (p. 54). However, not all measures that improve productivity are so comfortable for the pigs. In particular, “the amount of space needed per pig for optimal performance” (PIH, p. 55) does not necessarily correspond to the amount of space a pig needs to move around freely.

Quotation 6:

Cages for weaned pigs have zestfully captured the attention of pork producers. They do offer . . . improved pig performance. A 4 x 4 ft. cage will accommodate a litter of about 8 pigs up to 40lb. (PIH, 2002, p. 70)

However, the comfort and well-being of pigs is mentioned in several places in the PIH. PIH (2002, p. 69) recommends planning for “animal comfort . . . and labor efficiency”; PIH (p. 140) describes the effect of disease on “performance . . . and animal well-being”; PIH (p. 146) recommends “euthanasia” as the best option for “various pig welfare” and “economic” reasons; and PIH (p. 31) recommends copper for “normal pig growth and well-being” (all emphases added). The pattern is clear: The word, “pig,” is used as a modifier of the words, “comfort,” “well-being,” or “welfare,” making expressions like “pig comfort” appear to be variables in equations. Frequently, in proximity to “pig comfort” are expressions relating to economic factors. Variables can be adjusted; as “pig welfare” is only one of the factors in equations aimed at maximizing...
profit, the well being of pigs may well be sacrificed if it conflicts with profitability. "While dry bedding can be used to keep pigs more comfortable, it is expensive . . . and is not compatible with . . . slotted floors" (PIH, p. 66).

In fact, the comfort of individuals is not quantifiable and, conveniently, is left out of the many tables and equations in the PIH. Mortality, however, which in one sense is the opposite of comfort, is quantifiable (Dunayer, 2001, p. 134), and does appear in equations (quotation 7).

Quotation 7:

Percent mortality = \( \frac{\text{No. died in nursery and/or growing-finishing stage}}{\text{Total no. entering for this group}} \times 100 \)

So, like comfort, mortality becomes a variable that can be adjusted for profit. Table 1 (PIH (2002, p. 100) suggests that in a farm with “excellent performance”, mortality is less than 10% from birth to weaning; the amount of space pigs live in is less than 2.8sq ft; and more than 2500 hogs are produced per full time laborer per year. The tables and jargon and equations hide an ideology seeming to dictate, in the pursuit of profit, that pigs should be as crowded and neglected as possible, but not so much so that a financially significant percentage die. The death of pigs due to the diseases and injuries associated with intensive farming is rendered not as a tragedy but as a purely economic consideration through the phrase “death loss” (quotation 8).

Quotation 8:

. . . in large continuous flow operations . . . Death loss and the number of chronically ill poor-doing pigs that result may be quite high. (PIH, 2002, p. 141)

The use of the expression, “death loss,” avoids mentioning who died and is used elsewhere as a euphemism for the “dead bodies of pigs” who die from illness or injury (quotation 9).

Quotation 9:

In a typical scenario, a bin is filled with three months death losses. PIH, 2002, p. 133

Among the “death losses” are animals who, having been ill or injured, have been the subject of another euphemism, what PIH (2002, p. 146) calls “humane
euthanasia” (Dunayer, 2001, pp. 137, 141). That this is a euphemism is illustrated in PIH (2002, p. 18), which describes one method for performing “humane euthanasia.”

**Quotation 10:**

Hold the piglet by its hind legs and forcefully hit the piglet’s head against a hard surface such as concrete. (PIH, 2002, p. 18)

The use of the pronoun “it” in quotation 10 is perhaps not accidental since it makes the piglet seem more like an object than a baby, making it easier to kill him or her. The pronouns “he” and “she” are, in fact, used in the PIH for less violent scenarios, but pigs often are objectified by the pronoun “it” (PIH, 2002, pp. 54, 140, 58, 122, 128, 87).

Using the metaphor, “pig as a machine” is another way of objectifying pigs (Coats, 1989, p. 32; Stibbe, 2002). Singer (1975, p. 126) quotes the pork industry’s explicit statement that a sow should be “thought of, and treated as, a valuable piece of machinery.” However, the PIH contains no such direct linking of pigs to machines, perhaps because animal rights activists use such examples to illustrate the cruelty of the pork industry. Instead, the PIH uses expressions that presuppose pigs are machines, making the ideology both covert and more powerful. Quotations 11-15 are examples of this.

**Quotation 11:**

As long as boars remain *structurally sound* [italics added] and are aggressive breeders, fertility is generally maintained. (PIH, 2002, p. 1)

**Quotation 12:**

Adequate *boar power* [italics added] is critically essential to take advantage of synchronization of postweaning heat. (PIH, 2002, p. 8)

**Quotation 13:**

Pigs suppress eating and increase *water intake* [italics added] during periods of heat stress. (PIH, 2002, p. 54)

**Quotation 14:**

To prevent *sow breakdown* [italics added] make sure the lactation ration is properly fortified . . . (PIH, 2002, p. 8)
Quotation 15:

*Sow durability* [italics added] and temperament are very important considerations. (PIH, 2002, p. 145)

There are many other examples of the metaphorical reconstruction of pigs as inanimate objects. Pigs are presented as resources which are “produced” (PIH, 2002, p. 85), resources which have “salvage value” (PIH, p. 8), and appear in lists with other kinds of resources such as “efficient flow of feed, hogs, and waste” (PIH, p. 70). The word, “damage,” rather than “injury,” is used (PIH, p. 8); piglets are “processed”—tails cut off, teeth cut, ears cut, castrated—(PIH, p. 18); boars are “used” (PIH, p. 83) and sows are talked about in terms of “volume slaughtered” rather than number (PIH, p. 132).

Finally, there are several cases in the PIH where the distinction between living animals and meat products becomes blurred. Hedgepeth (1998, p. 76) describes this as a difficulty in viewing “hogs as hogs rather than as neatly packaged collected assortments of ambulatory pork,” and Adams (1993, p. 204) captures the attitude with the simple expression: “To be a pig is to be pork.” Quotations 16-18 are examples of expressions that equate living animals with meat.

Quotation 16:

Some hogs have weak hindquarters, and they are more likely to fall down and “split.” The damaged meat has to be trimmed. (PIH, 2002, p. 116)

Quotation 17:

Choosing a meaty, lean herd sire will probably do more to improve carcass leanness than will altering various environmental aspects (PIH, p. 100)

Quotation 18:

One should incorporate meat-type animals into the breeding herd . . . (PIH, p. 26)

The creation of a high intensity pig farm demands a great deal of technology, including cages, farrowing stalls, and machines to regulate the environment and flow of feed and waste. Language is as important as the technology because language plays a central role in the design, construction, and everyday operation of the farm. Nowhere does the discourse of the PIH
explicitly state that pigs should be treated as objects, that their pain and misery should be ignored, that they are just pork rather than animals. Instead, the ideology is covertly conveyed and perpetuated in the equations; tables; technical jargon; and, above all else, in presuppositions permeating the book. Through being covert, the ideology is all the more powerful and resistant to criticism.

**Alternative Constructions of Pigs**

When ideology is implicit, it cannot be resisted through direct opposition of the propositional content of the language in which it is embedded, because the ideology appears only indirectly in presuppositions. However, ideology can be challenged through critical analysis of the language itself, which exposes presuppositions and the interests they serve. Critical language awareness has been a part of the animal rights movement since its inception. Singer (1975) describes the appalling conditions on pig farms and intersperses his description with quotations from pork industry sources, implicitly revealing the relationship between industry discourse and the conditions in which pigs are forced to live and die. Dunayer (2001) goes further by explicitly describing the relationship between language and oppression and conducting linguistic analysis of a variety of discourses that construct pigs and other animals. Such critical language awareness has the potential to undermine discourses by revealing their hidden ideological assumptions, thus taking away the power that implicitness gives them (Fairclough, 1992a, 1999; Males, 2000).

In addition to raising critical language awareness, Dunayer (2001, pp. 179-201) provides a complete set of guidelines for “countering speciesism,” which could be considered a form of verbal hygiene (Cameron, 1995). Among the many guidelines Dunayer gives is the suggestion that the term, “farm animal,” is a term to avoid, alternatives being “enslaved nonhuman” or “food-industry captive” (Dunayer, p. 193). For “bacon, ham, pork (etc.),” the guidelines recommend “pig flesh” (Dunayer, p. 193). An alternative for “pork producer” is “pig enslaver;” “cull” is “murder;” a “farm” is a “confinement facility” (Dunayer, p. 194) and the farmer, a “nonhuman-animal exploiter” (Dunayer, p. 195).
Overt attempts to change discourses, however, run into an effective weapon used by conservative society to resist social change: the charge of “political correctness” (PC). As Fairclough (2003, p. 21) points out, PC is an identification “imposed upon people by their political opponents,” providing “a remarkable, effective way of disorientating sections of the left.” Frequently, the media create absurd examples that mock attempts to change language. Mills (2003, p. 89) gives the examples of “vertically challenged” and “personhole cover.”

Non-speciesist language guidelines already are receiving similar treatment: A list of PC terms appearing on several websites (Political, 2003) gives the replacement, “stolen non-human animal fibres” for wool, in the same list as “aquatically challenged” for drowning. One correspondent, commenting on guidelines for non-speciesist language, wrote, “You mean at a fast food counter it would list ‘murdered bovine with brutally massacred swine strips’ when all I want is a bacon burger? What a JOKE!” Just as anti-sexism has had to define itself “in contradistinction to . . . what has been defined as politically correct” (Mills, 2003, p. 90), so the animal rights movement may find it has to do the same.

A way of providing alternative discourses that avoids the issue of “correctness” is poetic activism. Poetic activism is based on the appreciation of “the power of language to make new and different things possible and important—an appreciation which becomes possible only when one’s aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description” (Rorty, in Gergen, 1999, p. 63). Although verbal hygiene tends to represent its prescriptive alternatives as more accurate, truthful, or “correct,” poetic activism offers “provocative, glamouring, and compelling ways of talking and writing, ways that unsettle the common sense, taken for granted realities, and invite others into new dialogic spaces” (Gergen, 2000/2003).

A prime example of poetic activism applied to pigs is Hedgepeth’s (1998), “The Hog Book.” Hedgepeth first challenges dominant discourses through parody and irony (rather than intimations of falsehood) and then supplies new ways of thinking about pigs through the application of new discursive constructions. The use of parody to challenge the mainstream and pork industry discourses is illustrated in quotations 19 and 20.
Quotation 19:

“Hog” to many people means any obscenely rotund beast with a tropism for mud who trundles filthily along oinking. (Hedgepeth, 1998, p. 21)

Quotation 20:

[In an artificial insemination system], sows are viewed as simple pork machines and boars are vaguely undesirable characters who happen to make sperm . . . [the system has] the aim of turning out germ-free, computer-recorded pieces of living pigmeat. (Hedgepeth, 1998, p. 99)

Hedgepeth’s reconstruction of pigs employs novel metaphors, such as the human body as pig grave metaphor with which the book commences (quotation 21).

Quotation 21:

DEDICATED . . . to the millions of porkers who’ve gone to their final resting sites inside us . . . I’d like to call them all by name, but the list is long and I cannot remember. (Hedgepeth, 1998)

This metaphor resists the industry’s “To be a pig is to be pork” ideology, and quotation 21 also provides an unusual way of emphasizing the individuality of pigs, resisting the loss of individuality that occurs when pigs (count noun) become pork (mass noun) (Adams, 1993). Throughout the book, there are countless presuppositions that reconstruct pigs as “clear-headed, perspicacious beings with feelings”. Quotation 22 presupposes that pigs have a “spirit,” that is, are beings with feelings.

Quotation 22:

Yet for every gain in efficiency there’s an equivalent loss in spirit. (Adams, p. 160)

To provide a “new definition of hogness,” Hedgepeth uses intertextual borrowing (Fairclough, 1992b, p. 101) to apply discourses from other domains to the human-pig relationship. One of these intertextual borrowings makes use of the discourse of psychology (quotations 23-24).

Quotation 23:

Cultural Hogrophobia . . . is a socially institutionalised fear of hogness. (Hedgepeth, 1998, p. 6)
Quotation 24:

We rely upon the hog in many ways for support and for a sense of definition—definition of ourselves, for instance, as presumably superior, handsomer, and all-round more legitimate creatures. It’s in this way that we subconsciously employ the hog (Hedgepeth, 1998, p. 200)

Paralleling self-help psychology, Hedgepeth claims that in coming to terms with hogrophobia you can develop a “new hog consciousness” and “eventually emerge as a changed and better person” (Hedgepeth, p. 197). This change is constructed—not only as psychological growth but also as spiritual growth—through intertextual borrowings from the domain of spiritual discourse. Quotations 25 and 26 illustrate the use of spiritual discourse to contribute to what Hedgepeth calls a “massive redefinition of hogness for the new age” (Hedgepeth, 1998, p. 26).

Quotation 25:

True “hogritude”—the mystical essence and condition of being an actual hog—demands extended periods of meditation. (Faircloth, p. 173)

Quotation 26:

The all-pervasive essence of Hog had resonated across time and insinuated itself deep into . . . our collective mind. [We are] awaiting some hopeful opportunity to transcend ourselves . . . [and pigs provide] . . . an ideal agent for inducing us to break our narrow containments . . . and thereby scale new heights of enlightenment and psychic liberation . . . (Faircloth, p. 198)

Like his parodies of the discourses of oppression, Hedgepeth’s application of psychological and spiritual discourse to pigs is exaggerated, tongue-in-cheek, and not intended to be taken (too) seriously. This derails any attempt to criticize the work for being politically correct.

Conclusion

In the end, a pig farm essentially is a relationship: a relationship between two groups who happen to be from different species, one human and one porcine. The trend toward the end of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first century is for this relationship to be increasingly remote, with decisions that have profound consequences on the lives of pigs being taken in distant,
air-conditioned offices. In addition, the increasingly citified general population is far more likely to come across pigs in insulting linguistic expressions than face-to-face. The relationship, therefore, becomes more and more mediated by language.

Textual mediation in itself is neither good nor bad. Clearly, discourse has the power to legitimize relationships in which one group causes immense suffering to the other. The many examples from the pork industry discussed in this paper suggest that the discourse of the pork industry is doing exactly that.

Equally, language can be used imaginatively to resist dominant discourses and open up new alternatives, as Dunayer (2001), Hedgepeth (1998), and others are doing. If these attempts are successful, future generations may refer to pigs as “enslaved nonhumans” or, perhaps preferably, as “creatures of boundless charm and enchantment” (Hedgepeth, p. 160). The change—whatever it is—is necessary, and Hedgepeth (1998) eloquently expresses the reason why:

   And so we go on about the routine exploitation of our hogs in the name of Agriculture or Industry & Commerce or Better Pork; and in the end it all contributes to the vast-scale devaluation of life itself, for one cannot deny the legitimacy of another creature without diminishing one’s own. (p. 199)

Notes

1 Correspondence should be sent to Arran Stibbe, English Department, Chikushi Jogakuen University, 2-12-1 Ishizaka, Dazaifu 818-0192, Japan.

2 The CD-ROM version of the PIH was used for analysis. Numbers in references to the PIH refer to information sheet numbers (rather than page numbers), as these are the same for both the CD-ROM and print version.

3 The term metaphor is used here and elsewhere in the paper in the sense of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) and Lakoff (1993) call conceptual metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 45), “the way we conceptualise [complex domains], reason about them, and visualise them, comes from other domains of experience ... Conceptual metaphor is pervasive in both thought and language. It is hard not to think of a common subjective experience that is not conventionally conceptualised in metaphor.”
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