The Communicative Relationship Between Humans And Canines In Bruce Cameron's A Dog's Way Home

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Abstract

Human and Canine relationship is inevitable as long as communication exists. This research paper, "The Communicative Relationship between Human and Canine in Bruce Cameron's A Dog's Way Home," analyzes dogs' understanding of human language and response. The objective of the research study is to portray how Bruce Cameron portrays the concept of human-canine communication in A Dog's Way Home. William Bruce Cameron is an American author, humourist, and columnist best known for his novel A Dog's Purpose, which was made into a film starring Dennis Quaid. The investigation of human-animal and animal-animal communication is essential to this paper. More than any other animal, dogs have evolved with the ability to understand and communicate with humans due to physical and social evolution. This paper focuses on how dogs and humans communicate with one another. The paper's key accomplishments include examining canine and human communication methods and appropriate remarks and recommendations for further improvement.

Key Words: Human-Canine, Communication, Relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Canine's relationship with humankind started from the day humans came into inter existence with domesticated animals. Dogs have always been man's best friend, loyal and kind. It communicates with humans through body language, auditory com[1]munication, and behaviours. They can understand some human words through verbal and nonverbal communication. Owners expect their pets to accomplish certain things but fail to exhibit or communicate their expectations.

When a word said by a human is coupled with positive reinforcement, a dog is more likely to understand it. In positive reinforcement, a reward or reinforcement is given to a dog in appreciation of a good or desired behaviour. For example, if a dog sits on command, the owner may provide a treat as

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a reward for the dog's obedience. This reinforces the behaviour and encourages the dog to repeat it in the future. Cameron depicts it thus:

> "Want a treat, Bella? Treat?" I gazed up at Lucas, feeling something was expected from me, but not comprehending any of it. Then he pulled his hand out of his pocket and gave me a small chunk of meat, unleashing a flood of delicious sensations on my tongue. Treat! Soon it was my favorite word (22).

In the novel, Bella, the dog, does not comprehend the meaning of the word "treat" when Lucas first uses it. When a reward is offered to the dog, it develops into a behavioural pattern of understanding the same. Bella picks up the connotation of the new word "treat" when Lucas offers food. Every time Lucas utters the word "treat," Bella understands that she will get food.

'Naming' plays an inevitable role in asserting an individual's identity. The same pattern applies to Canines too. When dogs hear their name combined with orders or phrases they are familiar with, they understand what the owner expects. People tend to repeat their names with particular terms when talking about their dogs. Repeating the phrases also makes dogs understand what the owner says. For instance, in the novel, when Bella hears the word "No Barks," she understands that she should not bark and stop barking if she does. Cameron demonstrates that dogs can sense when humans talk about them or use phrases they recognize despite their inability to follow human discussions.

> "Honestly, I think they are doing a don't-ask, don't-tell. As long as Bella doesn't bark, no one is going to complain, and we have a system where I check left and right and then take her right to the street. If none of the other tenants officially notifies them, I think we're okay. Bella does a good job of No Barks." I glanced up, startled. No Barks? What did that mean in this context? (83)

Bella does not understand what Lucas is conversing about, but when she hears the term 'No Barks,' she recognizes it instantly as a gesture, as Lucas typically uses those words when she barks.

Canines tend to comply with the tone of the owner than their actual words, as the tone is more important than just the words. They observe carefully to determine what humans want them to do or not to do. They put all their observations together to determine what their owners say. In his Dogspeak: How to Understand Your Dog and Help Him Understand You, Mathew Hoffman states that "Dogs can identify tones very well, and they often pay more attention to the tone than what is said" (158). In the novel, Bella is able to recognize different tones and ascribe meaning to them accordingly. Cameron claims that many individuals, not only Lucas, use the same tone every time they leave their dog. "I did not understand the words, but the tone was familiar. When people left their dogs, their voices often carried the same inflexion. When Lucas did Go to Work, he sounded like this" (147).

Humans have developed intimate communication with canines for a long time. People can understand dog communication thoroughly like other dogs can, mainly if they have observed dogs for a long time and can create oneness with the dogs. Dog language consists of signals and body languages, such as movement and positioning of the ears and tail, and they tend to react to the situation correspondingly. Canines react the moment they hear their name. In the novel, the author presents instances where the dog reacts to humans uttering its name.

> "Okay." Taylor looked down at me intently. "Number one. Lucy?"

> I stared back. Was Lucy some sort of treat?"

"Next," Gavin said.

 […]

"Bailey?"

"We tried Bailey."

"Bella?"

I cocked my head. It was the first time either one of them had said my name.

"Maggie?"

"Wait," Gavin said. "Go back. There was something."

"Bella?"

Why was he saying my name? I yawned.

"Bella?" Gavin called.

I turned and looked at him (200,201).

Two men try to discover Bella's name by closely watching her reaction. The men try various names, but Bella is unresponsive to any of them. Finally, when one of them says Bella, she tilts her head to signify that she recognizes the term. They mention it again, and she indicates that she is paying attention to that name. They conclude that the dog's name is Bella.

Humans presume that dogs can understand and interpret human language. Though dogs attentively listen to human conversation, they cannot understand what humans say except for some words they can connect with. "I was drowsily listening to the men talk, hoping to hear words I understood and that had to do with food, when the sharp tang of blood reached me (174)." Bella listens to the men and understands that their conversation is related to food. She barks to imply that she is hungry. But the men fail to interpret it and continue their conversation.

An American researcher, Virginia Morell, in her article Dogs really do listen to us, records the experiment and its result thus: The researchers played a recorded short sentence, "Come on, then," and watched which way the dogs turned. When the animals heard recordings in which individual words were strongly emphasized, they turned to the right, indicating that their left hemispheres were engaged. But when they listened to recordings with exaggerated intonations, they turned to the left, indicating that the right hemisphere was responding. Thus, dogs seem to process the elements of speech very similarly to the way humans do (Morell).

The belief that dogs listen to everything humans say is unrealistic because dogs usually communicate silently and interpret body language rather than decipher words. It does not work the way human-human conversations work. People talk to animals as if they can grasp whatever one says as a way of communication. The human-animal bonding doesn't usually happen just by means of successful verbal communication. There are instances when people talk to their dogs, even if they don't understand or respond since it's natural as communication is not necessarily two-sided. Cameron incorporates this typical characteristic that almost every cat or dog owner is familiar with and can connect to. As he states in A Dog's Way Home, "Here is some water, too. Do you have kittens? You look like you're nursing.

Did they take your babies? Oh, kitty, I am so sorry. They're going to tear down these houses and put up an apartment complex. You and your family can't stay here, okay (8)?"

Lucas converses with Mother Cat in the same manner that many humans talk to animals. People frequently speak to them as if they expect them to respond, but animals never do. Mother Cat seems unresponsive to what Lucas says, yet he continues to converse with her. In Times of India E-Times, People who talk to their pet dogs are smarter than others! The writer states, "As per a study by the University of Chicago, scientists claim that talking to non-human beings or inanimate objects has been seen as a sign of stupidity for centuries, but in reality, it is the reflection of our brain's greatest ability. The researchers shared that talking to your pet is a part of the concept called anthropomorphism." They claim that people talk to animals because they have a face, and it is a human need to share thoughts.

Animals do connect with humans regularly. The issue is that humans do not always comprehend dog language and, as a result, do not know what their dogs want.

> Both boys laughed. My attention had become focused on the crinkly package in Warren's hand. There was still a little piece of dog snack in there. I wondered if he knew it. I was doing Sit, and now I shuffled my weight from one front paw and back to signal that such excellent behavior deserved that last fragment of meat(145).

Bella does not bark or snarl in this situation but instead uses her body language to instruct the boys on what they should do. If the boys had seen her, they would have noticed that she was trying to communicate with them. But, the boys do not understand that Bella wants the meat as they cannot interpret it correctly. This behaviour is typical of dogs in general, and Cameron uses it to show how dog attempt to communicate is often misinterpreted, even though it clearly expresses its needs.

Animal-animal communication is prominent in nature. Dogs communicate with other dogs and animals in a familiar pattern, circling and sniffing each other. Bella spends much time finding her way home and interacting with various animals. Two male dogs welcome Bella by wagging their tails and sniffing one another. Bella wags her tail to express her goodwill to avoid getting into trouble or harming the other dogs. Canines are good at reading body language and comprehending what the other dog is trying to express. "Small Male ran straight at me, then pulled up, raising his snout as he stopped. I turned and we sniffed each other. Big Male also examined behind my tail. I moved rigidly, not prepared to play bow with two males on either side of me, but wagging a friendly greeting". (149)

Animals have restrictions and cannot communicate in the same manner as people do. They resort to alternative means, as Cameron demonstrates in the novel,

> After some time, I felt Big Kitten halt. I turned and looked at her. She was sitting down, regarding me with light-colored eyes. Though we were now far away from the angry men, I wanted to keep going, keep making progress toward Lucas. When I took a few steps and looked over my shoulder, she trotted a little bit in a slightly different direction, then stopped. She looked toward where she seemed to want to go, then turned to me with what felt like expectation (159).

Big Kitten and Bella do not need to debate or quarrel about where they should go next. The following passage is another illustration of Bella's ability to discern Big Kitten's plight: "The way she held herself reminded me of the cats in the den when there were humans coming in through the hole: the same rigid body, the same wide-eyed stare, lips drawn back slightly. She was terrified" (159). Bella understands how Big Kitten feels by looking at her and understanding her body language. Canines do

not always require auditory communication to express their feelings; they rely on gestures and body language.

Cameron includes several passages to demonstrate how animal-animal communication works and why allowing animals to communicate with one another is necessary to enjoy a better social life. For example, people frequently restrict their dogs from sniffing other dogs while outside but forget that dogs welcome one another by sniffing and licking. The author says canines do not sniff for enjoyment but to establish a social connection.

Dogs communicate with other animals and humans using a variety of means. Humans and dogs have complex communication relationships. Future research could look at dogs' gaze patterns and olfactory attention in human-dog and dog-dog interactions to see which body parts are more informative for dogs during communicative encounters.

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