

Animal-Human Communication

The human-animal relationship has been a subject of fascination for centuries and the question of whether animals have language or intelligence has been the source of frequent debate. Some scientists and philosophers have argued that animals function in a purely instinctive and imitative fashion, although they are capable of being programmed to respond in a certain way. However, many animal researchers today argue that 'higher' animals have complex brain structures and more advanced cognitive and communication abilities than is often realized. This paper will defend the latter viewpoint in focusing on animal research about the intelligence and language abilities of monkeys and dogs. Works referenced include: Valerie J. Chalcrcraft and R. Allen Gardner's study "Gardner Cross-fostered Chimpanzees Modulates Signs of American Sign Language"; Barbara J. King's article "Me...Me...Washoe: An Appreciation"; Stanley Coren's *The Intelligence of Dogs*; and Stanley Coren's *How to Speak Dog*". The first two will demonstrate chimpanzees' human-like cognition and language ability, while Coren's works will identify the nature of canine intelligence and provide compelling evidence of a complex canine language system and genuine canine-human communication. In addition, the paper will consider the political agenda implicit in animal communications research, which reflects the creationism versus evolution debate and raises the question of how humans and animals rank in relation to each other.

The field of animal communication has attracted considerable attention from both linguists and psychologists. Noam Chomsky, a well-known American linguist, suggests that only humans have the required brain structure to learn language (Coren, *How to Speak Dog* 12). Chomsky theorizes that humans are born with a built-in language acquisition system which explains the incredible speed with which children learn a language in the absence of formal instruction. Observing that toddlers are able to speak in grammatically correct phrases in their native languages simply by listening to and absorbing speech around them led Chomsky to suggest that children are born with a gene that allows them to identify the right or wrong language constructions. Moreover, Chomsky argues that language is a human privilege because humans give everything a name and it is through learning these names that toddlers build their vocabularies.