

ANIMAL PRAGMATICS

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Abstract

The meaning we convey in our use of language must be seen as jointly contributed by the semantics of the words, phrases, and sentences employed and the pragmatics of the situation in which the communication occurs. There is no doubt that animals across a broad range of species also convey meaning through their communicative behavior. Much discussion of this behavior has sought to analyze it by attributing semantic content to particular signals: such an approach, for instance, characterizes the treatment of vervet monkey alarm calls as "functionally referential." Schlenker and colleagues have offered a formal semantics for the signaling behavior of other monkeys. In contrast, a growing trend in the animal behavior literature rejects the attribution of properly semantic content to such signals, arguing that the meaning they convey should be attributed to their pragmatic value in particular contexts. The applicability of this account is assessed in terms of the partitioning of semantics and pragmatics proposed by Moeschler in various publications.

