

Homo and the Others:

The voice as a communication strategy*

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Abstract

Historically, the main means of distinction between humans and animals has been language. It can be said that the first perception and later analysis of the distance between human beings, who are endowed with language, and animals, which, on the contrary, are devoid of it, hinges precisely on the subtle yet crucial distinction between language and voice. Physical as well as metaphysical reasons have been brought to bear in support of this fundamental distinction between humans and other animals and, although Darwinian evolutionism has done away with now unacceptable conceptions, the debate is still raging today between those who argue for a strong distinction between humans and other animals, and those who instead see more continuity than discontinuity.

This monographic article aims to analyze the distinction between voice and language through the prism of the distinction between homo and other animal species. Specifically, after briefly introducing the debate on the issue and outlining the points of contention between continuists and discontinuists of human and animal language, we analyze the most recent scientific bibliography regarding the production of sounds as well as animal language.

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An attempt will be made to highlight the broad spectrum of differences and strategies implemented in the animal world by placing the human pathway within a broader evolutionary history. Starting from this more holistic methodological framework, we suggest interpreting some ethological data gravitating around the vocal phenomenon, in order to propose a historical analysis that goes 'beyond nature and culture'.

Keywords: vocal tract; larynx; evolution of language; animal semiotics; animal communication.