

A Linguistic Analysis Of The Agonality In The Discourse About Zoos



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Seminar: Linguistic Discourse Analysis in the Environmental Humanities
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Background

- Human-animal relations as an important interest of the Environmental Humanities
- Linguistic Discourse Analysis aims to redraw social values
- Discourse surrounding human-animal relations has become a focal point of public discussion (especially on social media)
- Zoos as a central part of the debate concerning human-animal relations
- In the public media contrary positions can be recognized



Aims & Key Questions

Do agonal centers exist within the debate concerning zoos and human-animal relations? If yes, what specific dimensions of agonality (and their linguistic indicators) distinguish them on a semantic level?

Results

Position pro zoos

Dimension competition for relevance

- “Und der Zoo am besten gleich in “Artenschutzzentrum” umbenannt werden.”
→ rebranding of zoos should show the importance/ relevance of zoos for nature and wildlife

Self-reflection

- Plädoyer für den Zoo als Rettung für viele Tierarten: Der Direktor des Kölner Zoos, Dr. Theo Pagel, stand seinen Zuhörern im Overath Cyriax Rede und Antwort
→ confrontation of Theo Pagel with his listeners who potentially have a different opinion. The past tense of the sentence implies the zoo directors success in answering the questions and therefore reflecting the aims and undertakings of his institution.

Humanization (diminutive)

- “[...] Einrichtung der guten Stube ist offenbar so gemütlich, dass sich Frau und Herr Faultier beim Abhängen gerne mal ein Küsschen geben.”
→ creating a positive picture of the life of the animals in zoos; sympathy

Position against zoos

Dimension of negative rating/ emotions

- Tiergefängnis; Missbrauch; Leid
- “[...] aus Profitinteressen und zur Belustigung zahlender Besucher vorgeführt”
→ Humanization: transmission of negatively rated human concepts, emotions; empathy

Accusations

- “Tiere einsperren geht gar nicht [...].”

Calls to action

- “Das Great Ape Project fordert Menschenrechte[...]”
→ urgency for change, unacceptability of status quo

→ **two agonal centers within the debate about zoos and human-animal relations**

Newspapers

Dimension of juxtaposition

- Layout, adversative connectors between the positions (*aber, doch, trotzdem, dennoch*)
- Variation of predominant position
→ support of agonality on a meta level

Methods

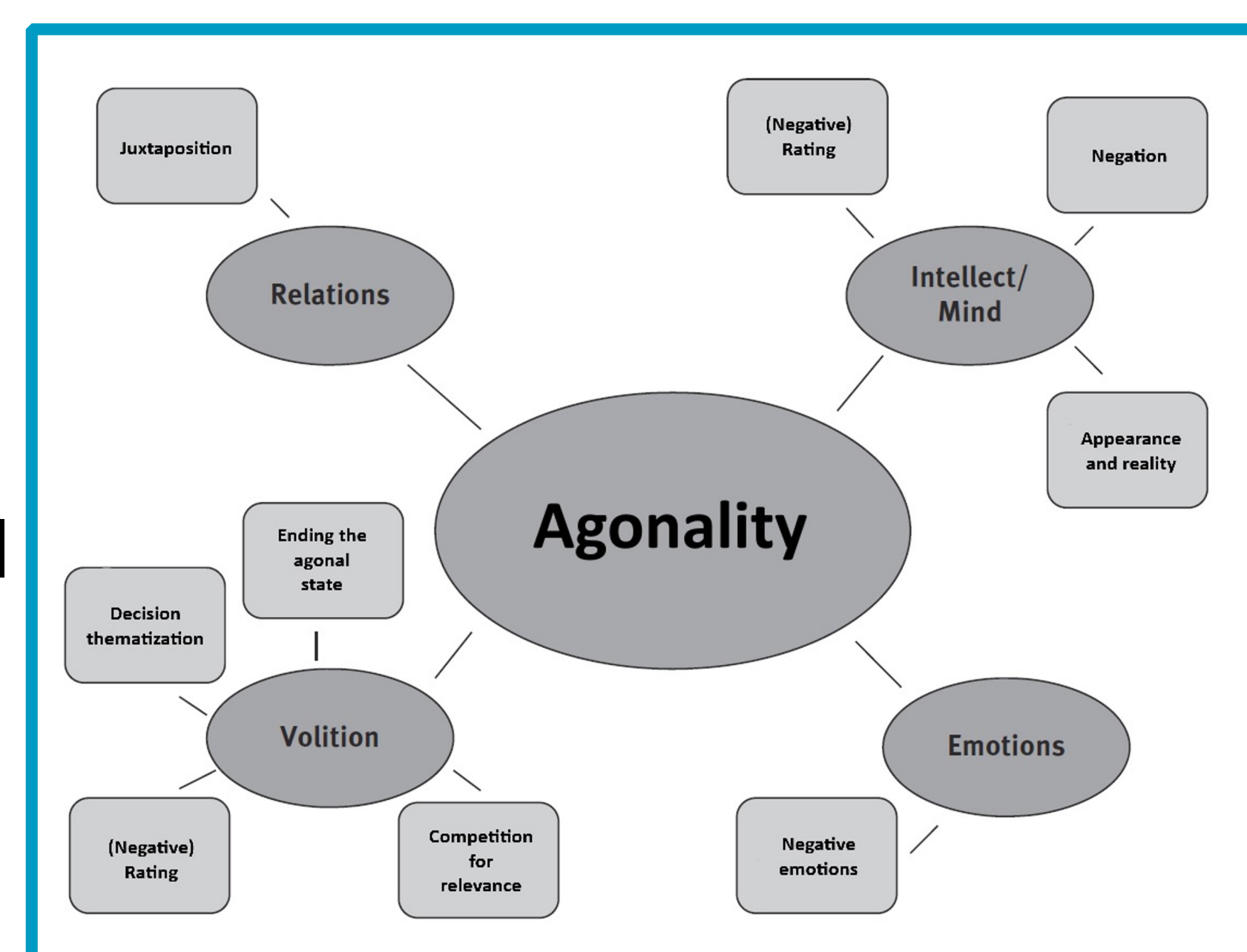
Definition of Agonality

- Arising conflicts within a debate → described by the criterias of agonal centers
- a competition/ public contest/ rivalry manifesting in language for controversial acceptance of interpretations, actions, values etc.

Corpus

17 newspaper articles from 2023

Semantic dimensions of agonality



Conclusion

There are two contrary, agonal positions in the discourse about zoos in the public media.

The different actors in the debate utilise the semantic dimensions of agonality with varying frequency and intensity.