

The Horse's Voice: How Trainers and Riders Make the Horse's Needs Relevant in Dressage Training

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Charlotte Lundgren PhD, Senior Lecturer
Dept. of Communication and Culture
Linköping University, Sweden

Developing Dressage Didactics

Departure points

Applied linguistics: Multimodal interaction analyses based on a dialogical understanding of communication

Equestrian research: Human-horse interaction depends on practical knowledge rather than theory

General aim

To describe and analyse the practical, tacit knowledge of dressage trainers, including teaching strategies, thus making this knowledge available for reflection and development


Aim of this substudy

To reveal how equine welfare is made relevant by trainers and riders during trainings

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Participants


- 5 established trainers
- 15 experienced riders
- 15 Swedish warmblood horses



5 trainers working
with 3 equipages
each in one-to-one
sessions

Data

- 750 min videotaped training sessions
- 400 min semi-structured interviews
- Field notes from the 5 yards



All data types used
for analyses in this
substudy

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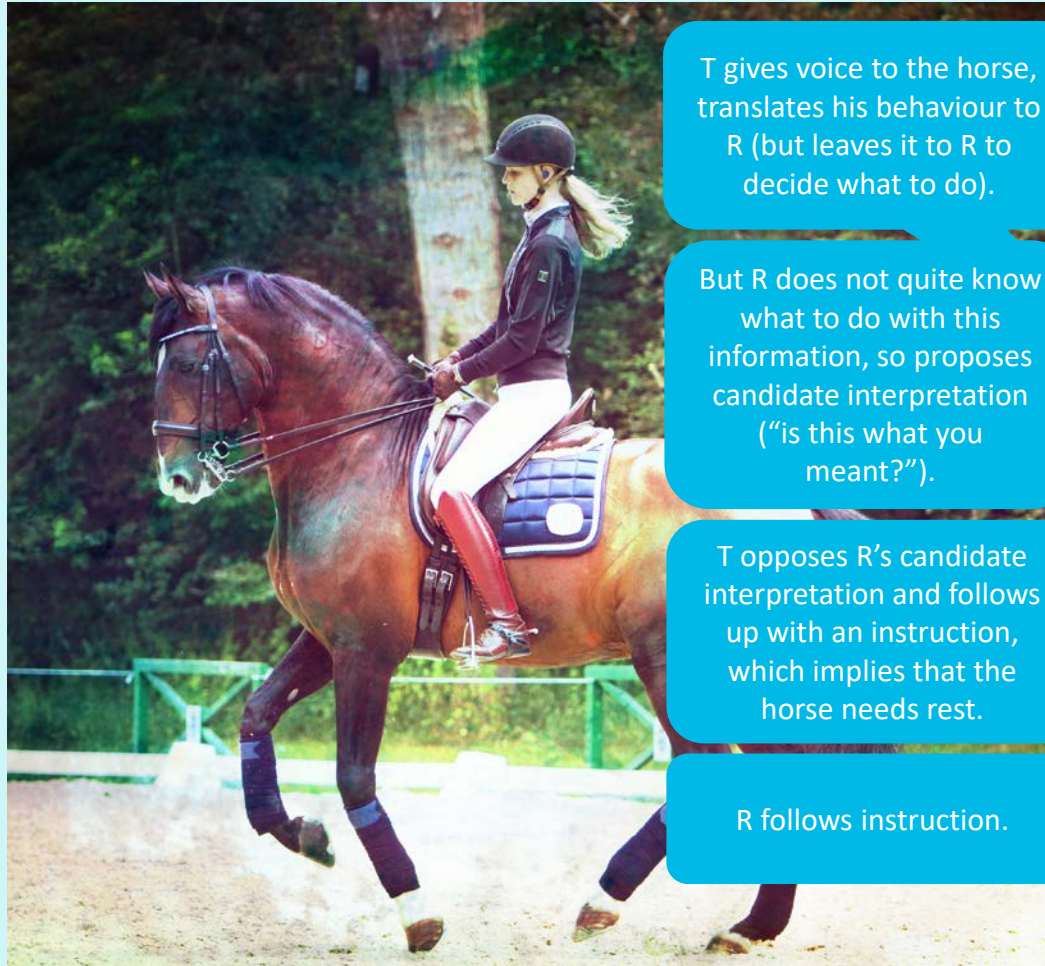
Horses contribute to the ongoing interaction e.g. by complying with or exhibiting resistance against demands from the rider.

However, the unfolding responses from trainer and rider are dependent on how they to interpret the horse's behaviour.

This interpretation decides what is an appropriate response to the behaviour.

NB! Example made up! Working canter exercise.		
1	H:	[elevates head, back tensed]
2	R:	[slight loss of balance, visibly tenses]
3	T:	he must learn that he ain't allowed to do that
4	R:	[tightens grip on reins, uses whip on right side once]
5	H:	[lowers head, back still tense, breaks out to left]
6	R:	[uses whip again]
7	H:	[breaks off into trot]

Example: Trainer making Horse's needs relevant



T gives voice to the horse, translates his behaviour to R (but leaves it to R to decide what to do).

But R does not quite know what to do with this information, so proposes candidate interpretation ("is this what you meant?").

T opposes R's candidate interpretation and follows up with an instruction, which implies that the horse needs rest.

R follows instruction.

Extract Id R4:14.50. 20 min into the training. Equipage has been working for canter pirouettes for some time.

1	H:	[kicks with one hind leg]
2	R:	[slight loss of balance, visibly tenses]
3	T:	now he's trying re::ally hard, he's trying so:: hard
4	R:	should'n'ta go harder on his left hind leg?
5	T:	nonono don't do that (.) we do it in walk instead
6	R:	[straightens]
7	H:	[breaks off into walk]

Results

- Trainers and riders do make the horses' behaviour relevant and treat it as reflecting the horses' cognitive, emotional and physiological needs
- Trainers and riders accept the responsibility to meet these needs, even when they collide with for instance the goals set up by the rider
- The needs of the horses are used as resources both to explain problems and argue for specific solutions to them
- Trainers use the voice of the horse as a didactical device to guide the riders' understanding of the unfolding interaction

What does this mean?

- Equine welfare is at it's core an **ethics-in-practice**, emerging in the local, contextualised interaction between horse, rider and trainer.
- It is reasonable to claim that such ethics-in-practice differ between various contexts, and that they over time sediment into rather stable practices.
- A locally emerging ethics-in-practice does not automatically correlate with our encoded ethics, such as it is expressed for instance in the FEI rules.

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charlotte.lundgren@liu.se

www.liu.se

FEI Dressage Rules

“The FEI requires all those involved in international equestrian sport to adhere to the FEI Code of Conduct and to acknowledge and accept that at all times the welfare of the Horse must be paramount. Welfare of the Horse must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences. The following points must be particularly adhered to:

General welfare:

(...)

b) Training methods

Horses must only undergo training that matches their physical capabilities and level of maturity for their respective disciplines. They must not be subjected to methods which are abusive or cause fear.”