

*“ A dog’s native language is body language.  
English is a dog’s second language. ”*

## CHAPTER FIVE

# A DOG’S NATIVE LANGUAGE

Sitting on the warm, white sand with the Atlantic Ocean rocking back and forth onto the western French coastline ahead of me, I held hands with a man I had only met yesterday.

He had a forlorn look upon his face as he spoke in hushed French tones just barely audible above the waves. I did not have a clue why quiet tears clung to his cheeks, but I knew the somber feeling of pain and sadness by the gentle way his words passed over his lips.

I was seventeen years old and had just graduated from high school. I had never been anywhere away from my family before, but when my high school French teacher announced that she was

organizing a trip to France for anyone in her fourth-year French classes, I was thrilled.

I only had a rudimentary knowledge of French despite four years of study, and so I understood a few words about family and death as the barrage of flowery sounds from this Latin language slipped past my ears. As the young Frenchman continued undaunted by my ability to understand what he spoke, my hands moved around his shoulders and he leaned forward to place his head in his hands. Compassion filled my heart as we sat together, listening to the roaring waves and the crooning seagulls overhead.

In an amazing twist to my memorable French vacation, I had only met him the night before. I had decided to accompany a few other girls in our group to a discothèque in the city near our hotel. Normally, I would not have joined them, as parties, drinking, and random socializing is not my thing, but I felt sociable that night and wanted to experience the French night life before our return to the states in just a few days.

Standing in the dimly lit room with French pop music blaring through the speakers, an attractive, dark-eyed Frenchman appeared in front of me, extending his hand toward mine.

*“Voulez-vous danser avec moi?”*

My head spun in a million different directions all at once. I understood the word “dancer”, saw his extended hand and head nod toward the dance floor, and wondered why this mysterious Frenchman with long, black curls, dark, imploring eyes, and soft tanned skin would choose to ask ME to dance over the other, much more beautiful, American girls with whom I stood. As the smoke in the room settled in a fog all around me, much like the swirling thoughts in my head, I accepted his gracious offer and from that moment on, he never took his eyes off of mine.

As he clasped my hands in his to guide me onto the dance floor, he told me his name was Jacques. At first, I looked at him with an empty stare, not understanding. He repeated his words in slow motion so that I could grasp each word individually as my seriously lacking French mind finally recognized the familiar phrase. *“Je m’appelle Jacques.”* I shared my name in return.

As he placed a confident hand on my waist, we danced together, finding the music’s rhythm as our bodies shifted closer with each new song. His head rested on my shoulder, and, for the first time in my life, I felt the rush of sizzling emotions well up inside. His hands moved down my spine toward the small of my back and rested there in an intimate moment as the song’s rhythm slowed in time with our steps. Beautiful French words caressed my neck, making my skin tingle, as he whispered sweet nothings in my ear, because I really could understand nothing.

When it was time to depart back to the hotel, the other girls had to pull me away from him as he pleaded with them to let me stay a little longer. Not knowing enough French, the actual words he spoke meant little to me. It was his heightened tones, the way his eyebrows shifted into a worried look, and his reluctance to let go of my waste that spoke to me of his intentions.

On our return to the hotel, a devastating accident involving a motorcycle blocked the road ahead of us. Sirens and flashing lights blared everywhere as I hoped for healing for all those involved. When I opened my eyes to look out the window in the accident’s direction, to my surprise, stopped next to our car, sat Jacques in a black leather jacket and helmet on his BMW motorcycle. Behind him, a male friend stepped off of the bike and knocked on our window. He spoke English in a thick French accent to let us know that the road would be closed for a while during the clean-up and asked where we were headed. He said that he could help us navigate around the accident and get back to our hotel. We agreed to follow him and off we sped downside streets and alleyways to circumvent the emergency vehicles around the scene.

When we came upon our hotel in the distance, there was an audible sigh of relief from us girls in the back seat. Following a relative stranger in the middle of an unknown city was difficult on the emotional trust scale, even if we were in our own vehicle.

Jacques and his friend parked next to us as we pulled the car into the parking lot at the front of the hotel. Stepping out to walk back inside, Jacques caught my elbow, twisted his head to the side, and pointed to a bench just outside the hotel under a streetlamp. His words were beautiful flowing sounds, but it was the quick way his brown eyes darted back and forth to mine, and the gentle

turn of his head toward the bench that let me know his thoughts. He did not want to let me go. I looked toward the other girls as their lips parted in a knowing grin. I told them I would be right in as they giggled in hushed tones back to their rooms.

When I turned to face him, Jacques's arm wrapped around my waist as he led me over to the bench under the yellow beams of the lamp overhead. No words were spoken as he reached his hand to the base of my neck and brought my lips to his.

We spent the rest of that entire night in a caressing embrace. The new light of dawn was the first sign that time had passed much too quickly, and I had not returned to my room. I stood up from our perch on the bench to move toward the hotel, but Jacques's hands pulled me down again to share another lover's kiss.

Eventually, I knew I shouldn't linger too much longer or my French teacher would miss me, so I broke away from his insistent embrace and moved back toward the hotel. Jacques's arm rested on my shoulders as he walked me back to the entrance. My heart soared with a feeling of acceptance and desire that I had never felt before in my young life.

As we walked up the front walkway, my French teacher emerged from the entrance of the hotel, eyes squinting and brows furrowed with panic and worry plastered all over her face. She admonished me for not returning, but Jacques explained it was his fault for keeping me out too late, that nothing had happened, and we were just sitting on the bench near the streetlamp. I scooted sheepishly back to my hotel room to gather my things for the trip to the Atlantic coast that day, while Jacques and my teacher continued to converse. French rattled on down the

hallway as I closed the door and fell onto the mattress in a love-struck stupor.

A few hours later, after gathering my things and getting a quick bite to eat, we all piled into the van to head to the western coast of France near Soulac-sur-Mer. My mind kept drifting back to the night before. I felt my cheeks flush as a few of the girls teased me about staying up all night with a boy. Then, my French teacher shared that Jacques had asked about where we would be next in order to meet me on the coast, where we would camp for the next few days. All the girls looked at me and my eyes widened. I never thought I would ever see him again and I could not believe that someone was as interested in plain-looking me as he was, especially enough to pursue driving miles to see me again!

During the drive to the beach, I could think of nothing else but Jacques. It was as if France simply disappeared and only a laser-focused pinhole of a dark and handsome man was all I could see. The swaying of the van lulled me into a much-needed sleep as dreams of his sweet embrace, the gentle touch of his hand, the exotic scent of his cologne, and the look of love in his eyes filled my mind. Surely, affection needs no translation.

Just like the language of love, the canine species also shares a very physical language. Dogs communicate with their bodies in a vivid way to share words, sentences, and paragraphs that express the stories they tell. A glance toward the door followed by a knowing stare at their master says, "I would like to go outside." A fleeting lick of the lips and quick tail wag at the base indicates, "I am unsure and need encouragement." A glance in a certain direction, then a bright head shake and snort tells us, "Nah. I'd rather not do it, if you don't mind."

Dogs are very expressive creatures, but they speak in a language many of us have forgotten. Humans have mastered the art of verbal communication, but many take for granted the nuances and raw power of body language. Dire Wolf Project founder, Lois Schwarz, calls this raw emotional non-verbal communication the universal language. In our busy, modern lives, much of this natural communication goes unnoticed, but the dog has not forgotten and spends more reflective time studying our movements and habits.

Some parents have learned that teaching babies rudimentary sign language can increase effective communication in infants and allow them an earlier voice than they would normally have with speech development alone.

Someone could make the case that sign language is more natural for humans and may have been part of our language development early in our human evolution.

Our tail-wagging family members, however, do not have vocal cords as well developed as our own. They cannot make nuanced sounds that produce an intricate verbal language, although some dog breeds may try. Instead, dogs have mastered body language. In fact, dogs are so good at reading body language that scientists have determined dogs are the most capable animals on the planet to interpret and follow human signals in order to find food without searching. No other animal is as adept at this skill as the domesticated dog, and many cognitive scientists place *Canis familiaris* squarely at the cognitive level of a two-and-a-half-year-old human child<sup>i</sup>.

## Stop talking to your dog all of the time! Your dog will listen to you more when your words have meaning.

We humans can forget just how skilled our dogs are at reading our own body language. Often, we are completely unaware of what signals we produce and how our bodies move. But dogs know exactly what it means when we crouch down with our hands outstretched and our vocal pitch rises. They become excited when our head turns toward the cupboard where the yummy treats are located. They are right there to greet us when they hear the bump of our hand on the night table and the heavy padding of our feet as we rise from bed in the morning. Dogs pay attention to every detail of how our body shifts and moves throughout the day. They are so observant, in fact, that many owners exclaim how uncanny it is that their dog can accurately tell time.

There is one particular book entitled, Canine Body Language: A Photographic Guide, by Brenda Aloff that reveals the body language of man's best friend in a highly visual descriptive way using photographs of various dogs. If you are interested in learning how to interpret your dog's native language, I highly recommend studying this book.

Another recommended visual reference book on the dog's native language is Dog Language: An Encyclopedia of Canine Behavior, written by Roger Abrantes in 1997. This book focuses more on the wild canine's instinctual body language and uses illustrations to show various postures and positions that dogs may exhibit when communicating with one another.

As I sat with my arm around this man with whom I had a brief history, my heart melted and I felt his grief as he covered his face with his hands. This moment of emotional intimacy always

perplexed me, though, because as he spoke through the tears, I could only make out a few words, regardless of how hard I tried to concentrate on what he was saying. My knowledge of French was simply too lacking to understand the intimacies of the reasons for his feelings. In fact, it would be many years before I truly understood why he felt so very sad that day on the beach with the waves crashing softly and the gentle breeze blowing his thick black curls back and forth. The man on the motorcycle who had died in the crash the day before was a close friend of his. He felt the pain of knowing the man's family would be destitute, and sorrow overcame him at the lack of knowing what to do for them. Without understanding, I had been there to help him through a troublesome time in his life as he processed life's greatest mystery: what happens to us after we die.

Against all odds, this summer fling turned into a long-distance relationship. Jacques was serious about getting to know me better and we corresponded through letters throughout the year. I pored over the French-English dictionary to grasp the meaning of every word he wrote. He spoke to me about his family and his job as a railroad operator. I learned that when he asked me to dance and passionately kissed me on the bench under the streetlight that he had been dating a woman in a nearby town. In my innocence, I questioned nothing he wrote because he wrote his words to me and it was the most exciting thing ever to happen in my life up to that point.

The next summer, after my first year of college French, Jacques came to visit me in America. Another year later, after another year of college French, I was accepted into the French study abroad program from Oregon State University and I spent my junior year of college at the Université de Poitiers in France. Despite four years of high school French and two years of

college French, it wasn't until I was completely immersed into the French culture and language that I finally became fluent enough to no longer need to translate my thoughts from English into French. Instead, I could share my ideas directly in French. In fact, I recall later that year that Jacques said I knew French better than he did.

Dogs are the same way. They need to be specifically and systematically taught and then completely immersed in our culture and language in order to become fluent at interpreting our complex speech. If I had never gone through the initial classes that taught the basics and then worked up to the more intricate French language of the written word, I would never have become as fluent as I did. In the same way, we must teach our dogs in incremental steps that gradually become more and more complicated. Dogs can learn a great deal of our human language, but they need a bridge made up of clues from their own native language to help them interpret what we mean by the words we say.

However, not all dogs are the same. Some dogs have a desire to work at snapped attention, while others need more repetition to understand. Just like some humans are better at learning languages, some dogs have an easier time learning English than others. That is why the need for this book has arisen so prominently. The DireWolf Dog is the first large breed of companion dog and learning our human language comes at a different pace and, as a result, should be taught at a different speed. We will find out just what to expect in the pages that follow.



Baring one's teeth in the canine world is typically an aggressive action. It is usually coupled with a low hanging head, staring eyes, raised hackles, and/or a low guttural sound in the throat. Human beings only bare our teeth when we are happy, such as when we smile or laugh. Domesticated dogs learn this important difference in their human friends.

Did you know that a doggie smile is seen by a widening of the lips at the crease, slightly open jaw, and a tongue that hangs out?

Dogs can also show their teeth in a submissive gesture of apology! Elwin, our resident purebred Alaskan Malamute, did this naturally when she was scolded and taught all of the dogs on our property at the time to perform this behavior when she scolded them. Even after Elwin left us, these dogs continued to show their teeth when scolded by a human. The next generation never learned it, however, and the behavior quickly disappeared from our midst.



## Canine Body Language Revealed



1. equals intimidation or confrontation, especially crouching down, staring, and moving forward.
2. Wagging tail vigorously at the base only, while the top is tensed and/or tucked is a form of submissive worry/fear.
3. Turning head away when challenged equals shame, remorse, or submissiveness.
4. Turning over on belly equals submission.
5. Baring teeth is a boundary warning.
6. Chewing on legs can mean anxiety or nervous energy
7. Chattering teeth is nervous anticipation.
8. Ears swivel toward a sound.
9. A short front bow with a tail wag is a playful invitation; known as a play bow.
10. Little quick nibbles on another's skin are affection.
11. Tail tucked is fear and anxiety.
12. Ears down and/or head down is nervousness or fear.
13. Head perked up quickly with ears pointed forward is an alert of a new sound or smell, especially when the dog stops abruptly in order to look/sniff/listen in a certain direction.
14. Pushing or bumping another with the nose is a question to know more about something.
15. Covering food or pushing nose on the ground toward food is a sign that the dog is not currently interested in the food, but will come back later when it is hungrier or more interested.
16. Walking slightly ahead, then looking back at the one following, is a sign or invitation to continue along the same path; to follow.
17. A paw on another's leg or body is a comforting gesture of intimacy or affection.
18. A growl is a warning that the intruder is too close
19. A snap in the air toward another is a further warning with heightened intensity.
20. High-pitched whine is desire.
21. Lying down on the ground with all four paws underneath and head down on or between front paws looking up at another is a sign that the dog does not want to do what is asked.
22. Sitting quietly near another looking up at them as if trying to catch his/her eye is a desire for acknowledgement. If ignored, the dog in this position will place a gentle paw on the other's body as a reminder that they are waiting. Further escalation of this behavior, if continually ignored, will cause a slight whine, bark, or other vocalization.
23. Licking another's face near its mouth is a respectful, submissive greeting.
24. Sniffing privates of another is a greeting much like asking "how are you?" - A way of introduction.
25. Wagging one's tail in a loose and calm manner shows contentedness. The faster the tail wags, showing no tenseness in the muscles of the tail, the more content the dog is.

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<sup>i</sup> Horowitz, Alexandra. Domestic Dog Cognition and Behavior: The Scientific Study of Canis familiaris. Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg. 2014.  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-642-53994-7>