A new study by scientists
Scientists are talking about a beluga whale. They recorded this whale making sounds like a human. The sound was like someone singing in the shower. At first, they thought it was a human voice.

Who said that?
One day in 1984, a diver came out of a tank at the National Marine Mammal Foundation in San Diego, California. He asked, “Who told me to get out?” It turned out that the cries of "out, out, out" had come from Noc. Noc was a beluga whale. No staff member had said anything. So, for several years, they recorded the whale’s sounds. After four years of copying people, the whale went back to making whale sounds. Noc died five years ago.

Whale Sounds
Whale sounds are usually high-pitched sounds. But when the animal made human-like sounds, the sounds were very low.

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Some scientists have studied the sounds of white whales in the wild. Sometimes the sounds were like shouting children. Staff at the Vancouver Aquarium said they heard something strange. They said one of the white whales said its own name.

**Vancouver’s beluga**
The Vancouver Aquarium’s beluga whale, Kavna, was a favourite with the public. The marine mammal care team had been caring for Kavna since 1975. Many visitors came to see her. She died in August, 2012, at age 46. The name “Kavna” means "female spirit of the deep" or "the one down there" in Inuit languages. The name refers to the Inuit legend of the mother of sea mammals.

Other animals can mimic
Dolphins, parrots and a harbour seal have mimicked human speech. Hoover, the seal, lived in Boston. He was the first non-human mammal to produce the sounds of human speech.

**Hoover’s story**
Hoover produced sounds like “hello there”, “how are ya”, and “get out of here”. The sound of a laugh followed these phrases. George and Alice Swallow found Hoover in 1971. The seal was an orphan. So they took him home. For a while the Swallows kept him in their bathtub. He ate so much fish that they called him Hoover. Hoover is the name of a vacuum cleaner.

**Hoover moves**
Hoover soon got too big for the tub. He moved into a pond in the yard. Then he started to mimic human speech.
Hoover moved later to the New England Aquarium. His foster parents told the aquarium staff that Hoover could talk. No one believed it. After a few years, Hoover’s talking became more clear. Then scientists became interested. They studied the seal’s sounds. Hoover died of old age in 1985. He is still the most famous seal in the world.

Hoover, the “talking seal”
Photo Boston Globe, New England Aquarium

Links:

Raffi wrote a song called “Baby Beluga” and visited Kavna: http://www.childhonouring.org/index.php

Listen to Hoover, the “talking” seal: http://www.neaq.org/animals_and_exhibits/exhibits/individual_exhibits/harbor_seals_exhibit/hoover.php

New England Aquarium, in the eastern U.S., where Hoover lived: www.neaq.org/

Einstein the Parrot: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7ht0a2OnA