

Session 1

Peter Bojo

- ▶ Definition of language
 - ▶ Design features of language
 - ▶ Human communication
- 

Language is a system of signs used for communication within a given linguistic community



- ▶ System: elements in it are not arranged and combined randomly, but according to some rules and principles
- ▶ Human communication – it is specific to humans

- ▶ All human languages have certain characteristics in common and linguists have identified these characteristics as defining features of human languages which set human languages apart from animal systems of communication. These features are called

- ▶ **DESIGN FEATURES OF LANGUAGE**



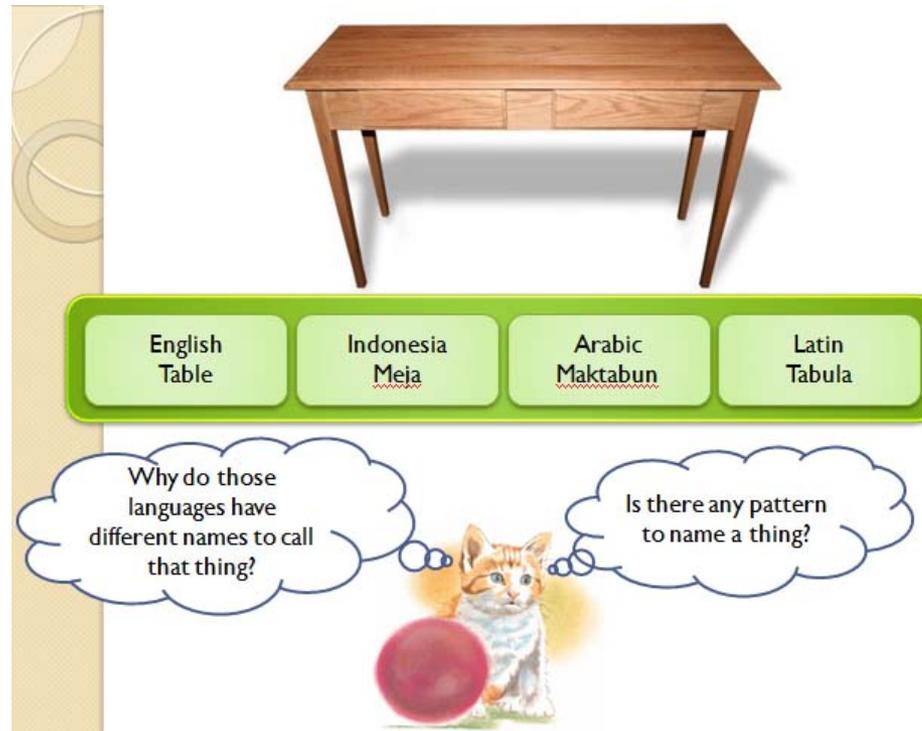
- ▶ Now watch the video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7ijl-g4jHg>
 - ▶ What are the bees doing?
 - ▶ What do they do to communicate?
 - ▶ Do they create new words, or do they just imitate sounds and movements?
 - ▶ Are bees able to create brand new utterances which had not been previously encountered?
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The main DESIGN FEATURES of language

- ▶ Arbitrariness
- ▶ Conventionality
- ▶ Learnability
- ▶ Duality
- ▶ Productivity
- ▶ Displacement
- ▶ Cultural Transition
- ▶ Discreteness
- ▶ Specialization
- ▶ Reflexivity
- ▶ Prevarication



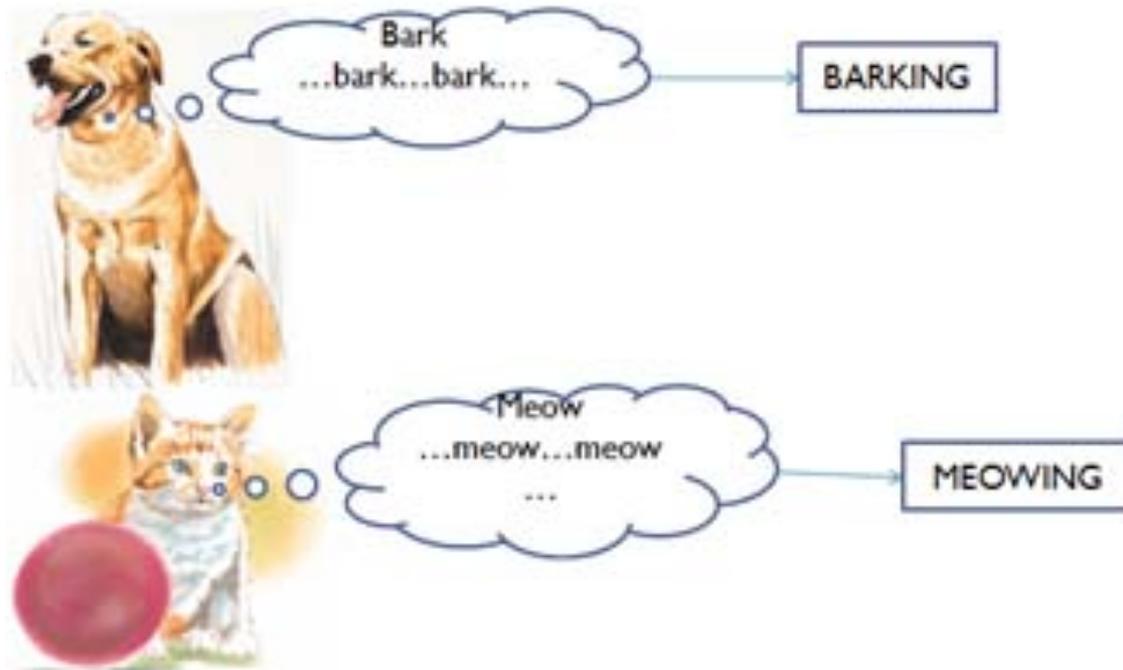
Arbitrariness



- ▶ “There is not a direct link between language form and its meaning. The name of an entity is thus rather a matter of convention“

Are all words arbitrary?

- ▶ Arbitrariness vs Onomatopoeia



Give an example of an onomatopoeic word

- ▶ Bang, beep, buzz, click, flip-flop, mumble..etc

Conventionality

- ▶ The idea words are only arbitrarily or conventionally connected to the things for which they stand

<http://www.udel.edu/anthro/budani/language.pdf>

Conventionality – what people establish as conventional – matter of agreement



Duality

C, D, O, O, T, R

Use the letters to make
words



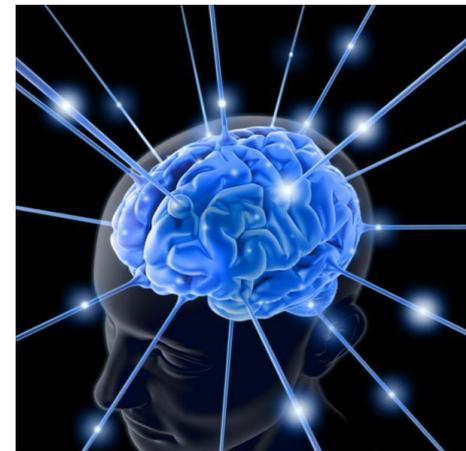
- ▶ Language is organized in two levels:
 - primary: level of sounds
 - secondary: level of elements

“...the basic sound units of speech, such as P, I, G, are normally meaningless by themselves. They only become meaningful when combined into sequences such as P-I-G PIG.”
(Aitchison, 1976:38).

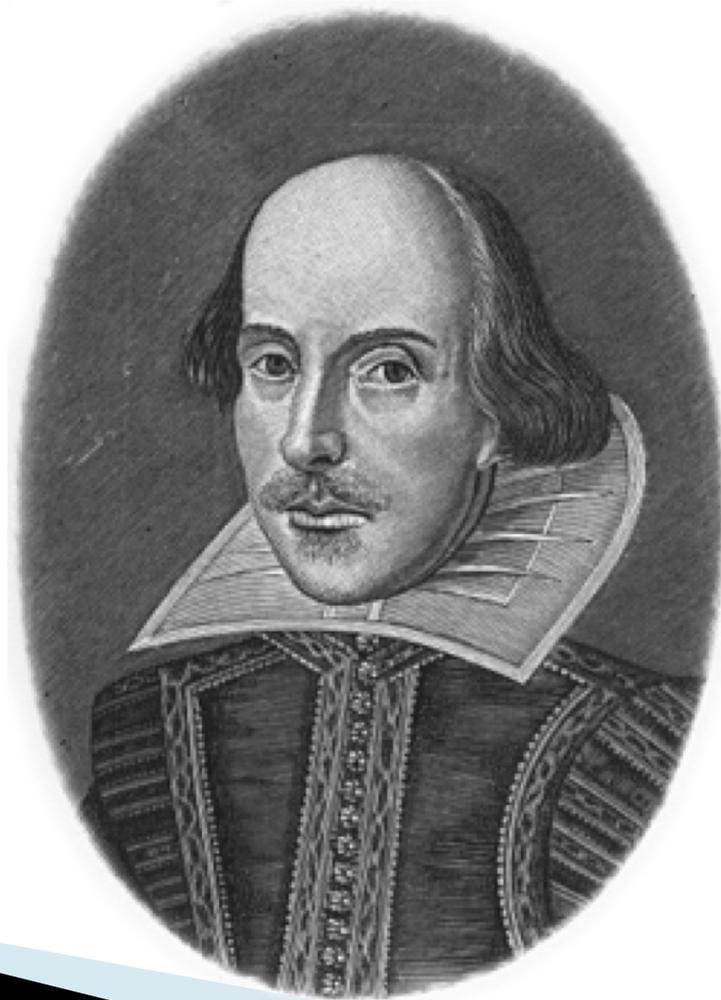
<http://www.sltinfo.com/duality-and-productivity-in-language.html>

Productivity

“...that property of the language–system which enables native speakers to construct and understand an indefinitely large number of utterances, including utterances that they have never previously encountered.” (Lyons, 1977:78)



Displacement



- ▶ **displacement (language):** The ability to communicate about events at times and places other than those of their occurrence; enables a person to talk and think about things not directly in front of him or her.

http://www.webref.org/anthropology/d/displacement_language.htm



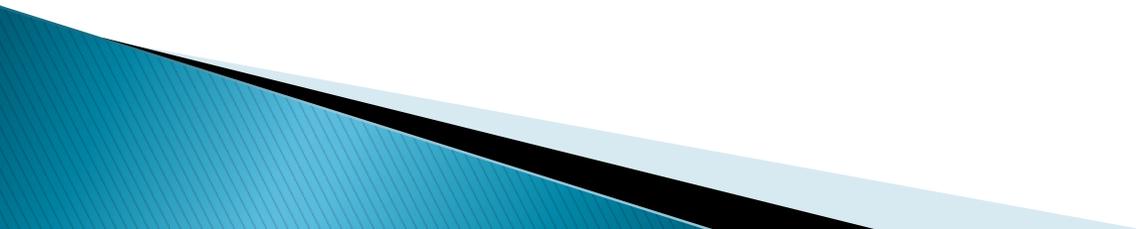
Cultural Transition

- ▶ A major difference between animal language and human language is the cultural transmission of human language. While animals get their language genetically, human beings acquire language. Human languages are passed down by the society in which one lives and grows up.



Discreteness

Each unit of communication can be separated and unmistakable.



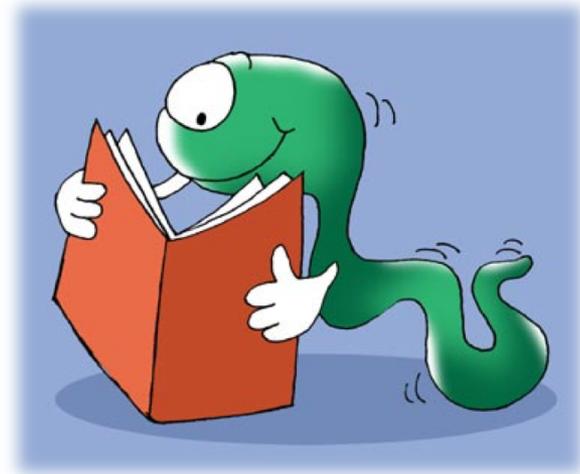
Specialization

- ▶ Language can be used to substitute an arbitrary expression for a physical action



Learnability

- ▶ People have an innate capacity to acquire a mother tongue
- ▶ People are also able to learn any of the other languages
- ▶ People are not genetically limited to use only our mother tongue



Prevarication

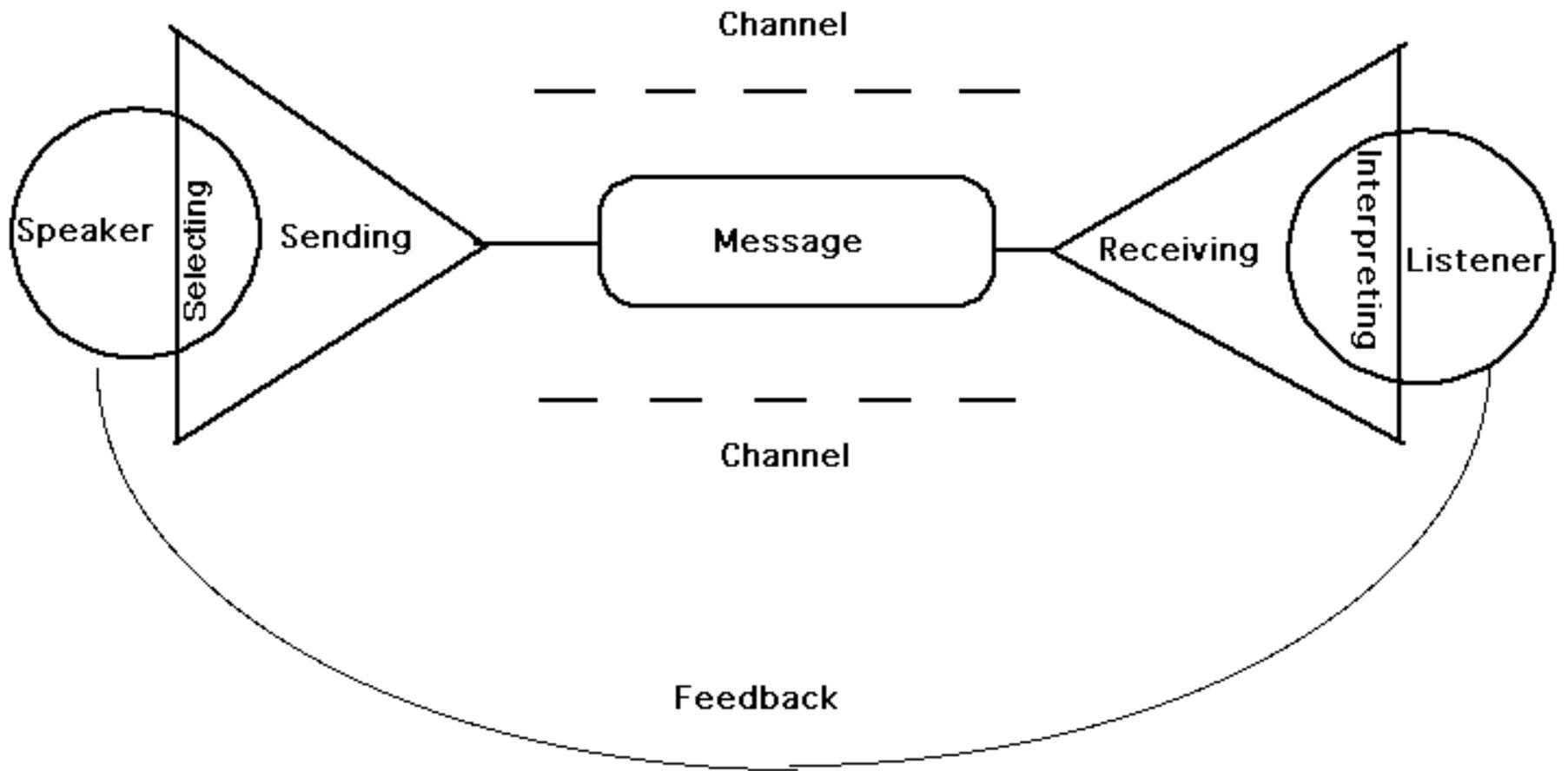
- ▶ Ability of humans to make sentences with the aim to mislead the receiver of the information



Human communication

- ▶ Communication – passing on or exchange of information





Further reading/watching 😊

<http://haillinguistics.blogspot.sk/2007/10/cha-pter-3-properties-of-language.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbcXKLpmDIM>

Thank you!

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