

Chapter Two: Properties of Language

1. UNIQUE PROPERTIES OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Arbitrariness → # no natural relation between a linguistic form and its meaning
 # the inventory of speech sounds in a language is arbitrary
 # sounds are arbitrarily represented by letters (e.g., /s/ send and center)
 # patterns into which words and sounds are arranged are also arbitrary

Displacement → meanings are expressed which are displaced or removed from the concrete or physical presence of the object

Cultural transmission → a language is passed on from one generation to the next

➤ **Note:** *innateness* of animal language

Modularity → language is a modular system: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, and discourse

Discreteness → flow of speech is perceived to be made up of distinct sounds

Productivity → users manipulate linguistic resources to produce and comprehend novel utterances

Openness: creation of new morphemes to express new ideas

Recursion: phrases expand by the expression of phrases within them

➤ **Note:** creativity depends on discreteness

➤ **Note:** *fixed-reference* feature of animal language

Duality of patterning → # meaningful whole is made up of meaningless parts

➤ **Note:** *economical feature*

a single sequence of sounds can have more than one meaning, e.g. [tu]
 (two – too) → **rely on context**

Grammaticality → languages have rather strict rules about how things may be said

Reflexiveness → language is used to talk about language

Prevarication → make false statements, lie, and make nonsense statements

Variability → language allows people to communicate far more than the semantic content of the words and sentences they utter, e.g. their geographical and social status, speech situation, culture, etc.

➤ **Note:** variability of language is indexical

➤ **Note:** consequences → no variety or dialect of a language can be better than any other

2. PROPERTIES COMMON BETWEEN HUMAN AND ANIMAL LANGUAGE

Vocal-auditory → communication signals are generated via the vocal organs and perceived via the ears

Reciprocity → speaker/sender of a linguistic signal can also be a listener/ receiver

Specialization → linguistic signals do not normally serve any other type of purpose

Rapid fade → linguistic signals are produced and disappear quickly

Non-directionality → language signals have no inherent direction

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