

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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Linguistics
The Study of Language

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Lesson Four :

Chapter Two : Animals and human language

Creatures are capable of communicating, certainly with other members of their own species .

Human language have some properties that make it so unique that it is quite unlike any other communication system, and hence unlearnable by any other creature .

Properties of human language

- 1- Reflexivity: is a special property of human language that allows language to be used to think and talk about language itself .**
- 2- Displacement : is a property of language that allows users to talk about things and events not present in the immediate environment , such as past events and future plans .**
- 3- Arbitrariness : refers to a property of language describing the fact that there is no natural connection between a linguistic form and its meaning .**
- 4- Productivity: is a property of language that allows users to create new expressions . It is also called " creativity " or " open-endedness " .**
- 5- Culture transmission: is the process whereby knowledge of language is passed from one generation to the next .**
- 6- Duality : is a property of language whereby linguistic forms have two simultaneous levels of sound production and meaning . It is also called " double articulation " .**

The potential number of utterances in any human language is infinite .

The communication systems of other creatures are not like that .

The honeybee, normally able to communicate the location of a nectar source to other bees, will fail to do so if the location is really "new". In one experiment, a hive of bees was placed at the foot of a radio tower and a food source placed at the top. Ten bees were taken to the top, given a taste of the delicious food, and sent off to tell the rest of the hive about their find. The message was conveyed via a bee dance and the whole gang buzzed off to get the free food. They flew around in all directions, but couldn't locate the food. (It's probably one way to make bees really mad.) The problem seems to be that bee communication has a fixed set of signals for communicating location and they all relate to horizontal distance. The bee cannot manipulate its communication system to create a "new" message indicating vertical distance. According to Karl von Frisch, who conducted the experiment, "the bees have no word for up in their language", and they cannot invent one.

This limiting feature of animal communication is described in terms of "fixed reference". It indicated that each signal in the system is fixed as relating to a particular object or occasion.
