

Characteristics of Language

Resources: J.Flaitz, J. Govoni, C. Lovell, E. Platt
with Google Images

Essential Question:

*What should every P-12 teacher know about the **English language** to effectively serve students from diverse cultural backgrounds and at varying English proficiency levels?*



What is language?

[View: YouTube \(2.57min\)](#)



Language is systematic.

There is...

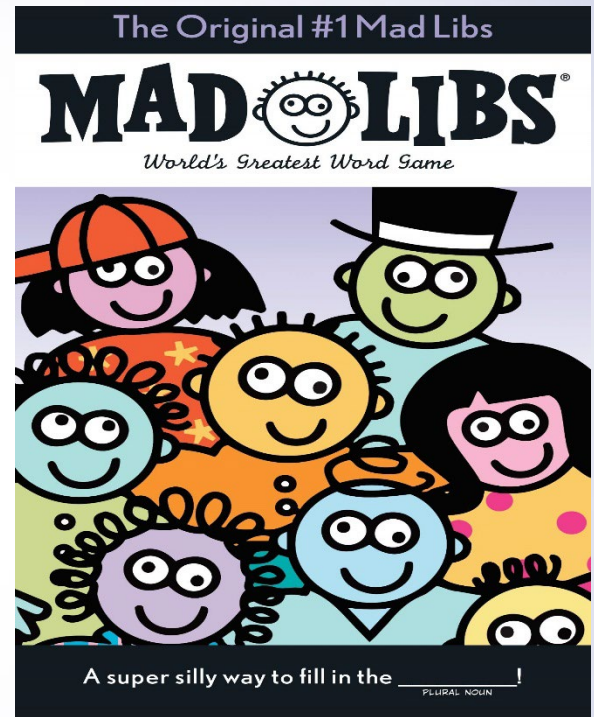
- **order and form.**
- **a system of vocabulary** to express an infinite set of ideas.
- **different shades of meaning** of words.



- Click on: [Online Mad Libs for Kids](#)

They are *short, silly stories based on your own words*.

Insert 10 words in the boxes online, click the “generate” button, and read your own short story!



- Describe how Mad Libs show that language is systematic.

Language is generative.

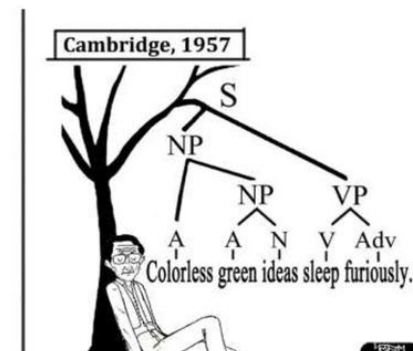
There is...

- a finite **set of words** and **rules** to *generate* or *produce* an infinite set of utterances.
- **no way to memorize** all possible utterances/sentences.

Generative grammar

Generative grammar is a linguistic theory that regards grammar as a system of rules that generates exactly those combinations of words that form grammatical sentences in a given language.

Noam Chomsky first used the term in relation to the theoretical linguistics of grammar that he developed in the late 1950s.



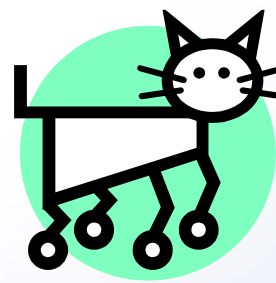
Language is an arbitrary set of symbols.

Arbitrary → **NOT** being able to predict...

- the **meaning** of a word when you hear it.
- the **grammar** of the sounds of the word.
- the **relation** between sounds and symbols.



house
maison
casa



cat
chat
gato



Arbitrariness ...

...when the same symbols occur in two different languages but carry different meanings.

“sale”

English: discounted price

French: dirty



“chair”

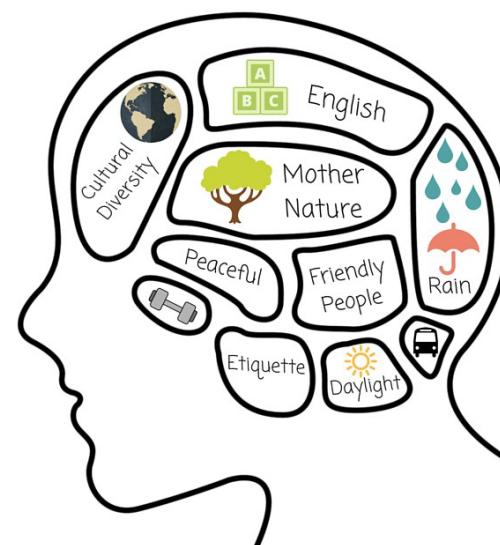
English: an object to sit on

French: flesh



Language has displacement.

- The capacity of human languages to **describe events not happening in the present**, e.g., *a speaker may predict the future, recall the past, or tell a lie about a situation from last week.*
- **Talking about last night's football game** or your new computer even though it is not in front of you.
- Language is used **to communicate** about what is not present, a hypothesis, or a plan.



Language is essentially human.



Language operates in a community.

Linguistic competence is being able to understand a language.

Linguistic performance is the ability to produce a language.

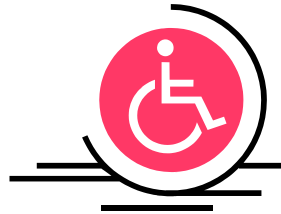


Language is used for communication.

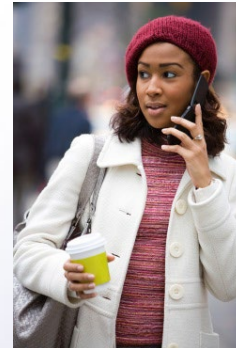


Language has symbols.

with meanings by their users



**Language is acquired by all people
in much the same way.**



- ☐ Can you describe **another characteristic** of language?
- ☐ *What should every teacher know about the **English language** to effectively serve all students?*



Every teacher should be aware of the **characteristics of the English language** to effectively serve ELs from diverse cultural backgrounds and at varying English proficiency levels.





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