

# LANGUAGE IS A LABYRINTH OF ROUTES

Depending on which theory is espoused, linguists may have different objects of study and methods of analysis!

## The origin of language

### COMMUNICATIVE HYPOTHESIS

**HOW:** language developed **gradually**. Some scholars (e.g. Michael Tomasello) believe that **gestures** are the starting point of language development

**WHY:** due to **environmental** and **social pressures**

**GOAL:** **communication**. Passing on **experiences** and **knowledge** contributed to the survival and development of the species.

**THE QUOTE:** "Language [...] is a form of **social action** constituted by **social conventions** for achieving **social ends** [...]." Tomasello (2010: 343).

### BIOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS

**HOW:** language emerged **suddenly** and **instantaneously**, without further modification.

**WHY:** the cause is a **genetic mutation** that occurred in one individual, who then spread it throughout the species.

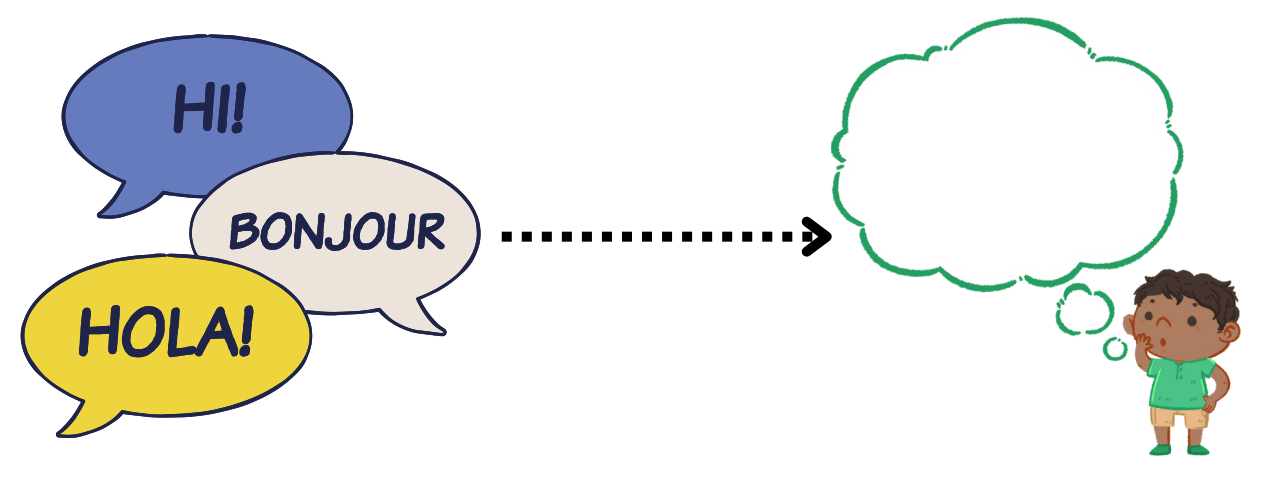
**GOAL:** language allowed for the systematic **organization of thought**.

**THE QUOTE:** the emergence of language [...] is very **brief** in evolutionary time, hardly more than an **instant**, and with **no evolutionary change** since (Chomsky, 2016: 21)

## The relationship between language and thought

### LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY HYPOTHESIS

The **language** we speak **influences** the way we **think**:

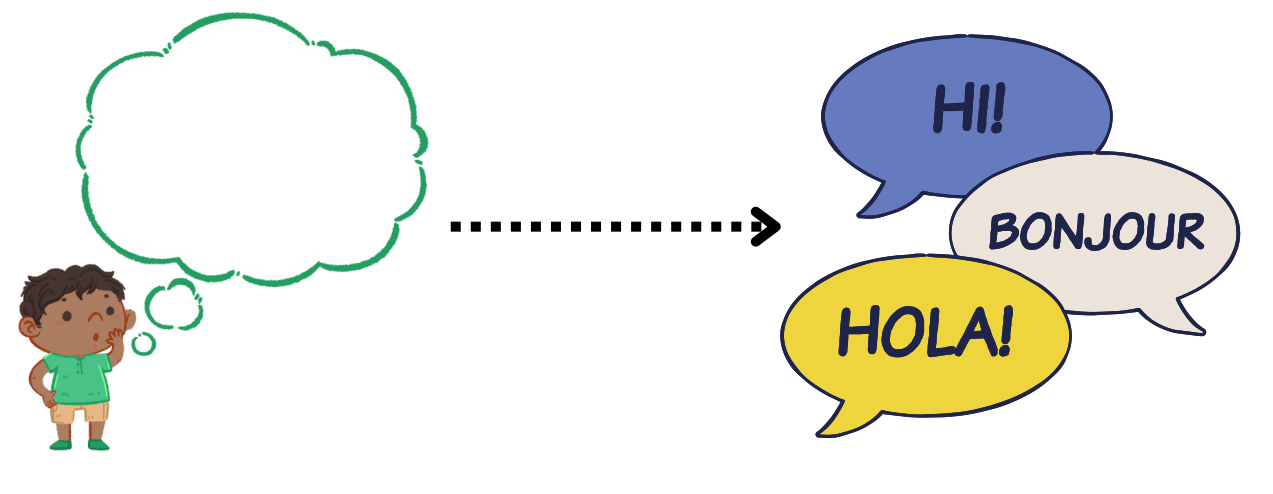


**EXAMPLE:** the Navaho language has ad hoc language structures to refer to the shape of objects.

One experiment (see Casagrande, 1958) proved that Navaho children recognize the shapes of objects earlier than English children.

### COGNITIVE RELATIVITY HYPOTHESIS

The way we **think influences** the **language** we speak:



**EXAMPLE:** An individual with language problems does not necessarily present general cognitive problems; on the contrary, individuals with general cognitive difficulties are more likely to present language problems. (see Furth, 1971),

## The importance of linguistic diversity

**To remember!!**  
 February, 21st: International Mother Language Day  
 September, 26th: European Day of Languages

### SOME DATA

There are over **7,000** languages in the world (ethnologue.com)

#### BUT...

- about **40%** of the **population** has one of the world's **8 most widely spoken languages** as their **native language**.
- Over **4000 languages** are spoken by only **2%** of the **population** (Gorter et al. 2012)
- At least **50%** of the **world's languages** are **endangered** (UNESCO)

- **40%** of the **world's population** does **not** have access to **education** in a language they **speak** or **understand** (UNESCO)

### THE INSTITUTIONS

The **United Nations** and the **European Union** recognize languages as **intangible cultural heritage**:

- Linguistic diversity is defended in **Art. 55** of the **United Nations Charter** and it is included in the **Sustainable Development Goals** (un.org)
- It is also defended in **Art. 22** of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** (europarl.europa.eu)

- Most spoken languages in the world:
- Mandarin
  - Hindi
  - Spanish
  - English
  - Bengali
  - Portuguese
  - Arabic
  - Russian

The mother tongue is "lived language and [...] studied language [...]: a communication tool that acquires 'cultural warmth'"

De Santis (2019: 4)