Language Development

Language

* **Language:** system of symbols and rule for combining these symbols into messages or meanings.

Structure of Language

* There are three critical properties essential to any language

    * 1) Language is symbolic

    * Uses sounds, written signs or gestures to refer to objects.

    * Allows for displacement.

Structure of Language

* **2)Structure: rules that govern how symbols can be combined**

  * **Is zpflrovc considered to be a proper word?**

Structure of Language
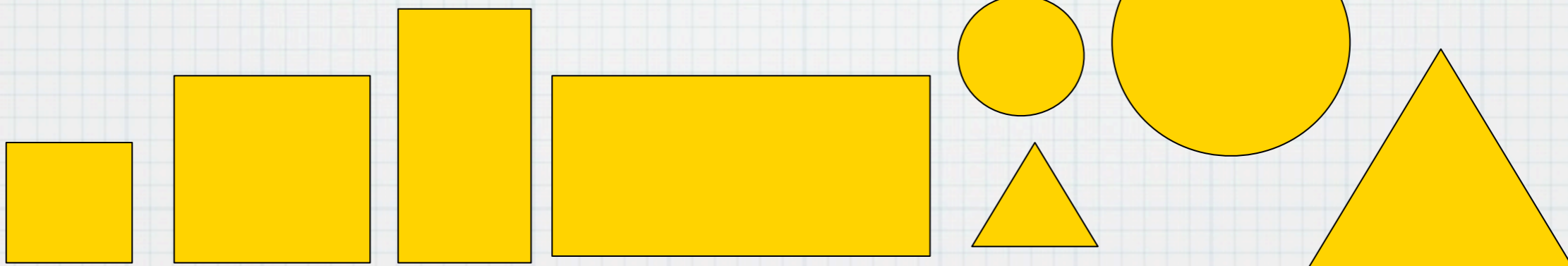
* 3) Generative: symbols can be combined to generate an infinite number of messages.

  * Can you understand "Who put the nightingale under my strudel?"

Development of Language

* Anthropologists believe that language evolved when humans gathered in larger social units.

* Language allowed divisions of labour, development of social customs, and the ability to pass down knowledge and customs

How Language Develops

* Your goal is to form a language.

* Since we only have a class period, your language will use a very limited world (i.e., shapes of varying size and colour) and a very limited set of word stems (i.e.,24).

* To illustrate your competence as using your language, one person should be able to describe a picture while another person produces it. Though this world is far less complicated then ours, communication is still complicated.

How Language Develops

* During the game, you can only speak with your groups' word stems. During "time-outs" you can speak English but you can not talk to your group-mates about the game.

* You can take notes (with English) to help reduce the working memory demands of the game. But do not show anybody what you wrote.

How Language Develops

* Pull out your lists of word stems. Remember these are the only word stems you can use in the game.

* Now pull out a single item from your world.

* When the game begins, say something using your language before you take anything else out of the envelope.

How Language Develops

* Testing your Language Development

* Divide your group into two sub-groups, talkers and listeners.

* The "listeners" get an envelope of the shapes. They should face away from the paper.

* The "talkers" face the paper and tell the "listeners" what to make, using their language.

* No group should look at what the others are doing.

* **Humans are inborn with the ability to acquire any of the thousands of languages in the world.**

* **Evidence:**

* **Infants can master language without formal instruction.**

* **1-3 months of age, infants vocalize the entire range of sounds found in the world's languages.**

* Social learning plays a key role in language acquisition.

    * Example: motherese

* Debate amongst cognitive vs. behaviorists about how important social learning is

* Behaviorists: Parents reinforce appropriate language

Language Loss

* **By the end of the 21st century half of the worlds languages will disappear**

* 15th century case study:

    * There were 15000 languages spoken at the beginning of the 15th century

    * European expansion = languages lost = 4000-9000 languages since the 15th century

    * Today the 15 most commonly spoken languages are spoken by half the worlds population, the top 100 by 90%

    * Most of these languages are European

* Mandarin Chinese is the most spoken first language (1.6 billion)

* English is the second most spoken first language but the first most spoken second language

* 80% of the worlds languages are spoken only in their country of origin

* A lot of countries require education to be in the most dominant language (Canadian Natives learning in English)

* Can having a single language help create a national identity?

Language Loss

* Culture is tied to language, lost language = lost culture

* Anthropologists view language loss (cultural loss) equal to biodiversity loss

* The answer? Promote multilinguistic environment, estimated that 2/3 of the worlds children are growing up in multilinguistic homes

Top Ten Languages Used in the Web
(Number of Internet Users by Language)

TOP TEN LANGUAGES IN THE INTERNET	% of all Internet Users	Internet Users by Language	Internet Penetration by Language	Language Growth in Internet (2000 - 2007)	2007 Estimated World Population for the Language
English	30.1 %	379,529,347	18.8 %	167.3 %	2,022,629,545
Chinese	14.7 %	184,901,513	13.6 %	472.4 %	1,356,701,170
Spanish	9.0 %	113,463,158	25.4 %	359.7 %	446,648,991
Japanese	6.9 %	87,540,000	68.7 %	85.9 %	127,433,494
French	5.1 %	63,761,141	15.6 %	422.7 %	407,819,872
German	4.9 %	61,912,361	64.2 %	123.5 %	96,403,511
Portuguese	4.0 %	50,828,760	21.4 %	570.9 %	237,003,607
Arabic	3.7 %	46,359,140	13.2 %	1,575.9 %	350,965,119
Korean	2.7 %	34,430,000	47.6 %	80.8 %	72,346,515
Italian	2.6 %	33,143,152	57.0 %	151.1 %	58,178,115
TOP 10 LANGUAGES	83.7 %	1,055,868,572	20.4 %	221.4 %	5,176,129,939
Rest of the Languages	16.3 %	206,164,125	14.4 %	534.8 %	1,430,840,227
WORLD TOTAL	100.0 %	1,262,032,697	19.1 %	249.6 %	6,606,970,166

* Should we (you) care about language loss and the associated loss of culture or is this just evolution?

* In small groups reach a consensus

* Brainstorm 3 arguments to support your position