

Language form, function and communication

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Language as a tool



A tool has a particular function (e.g. pounding nails).

The function of a tool 'motivates' its form.

Language as a tool

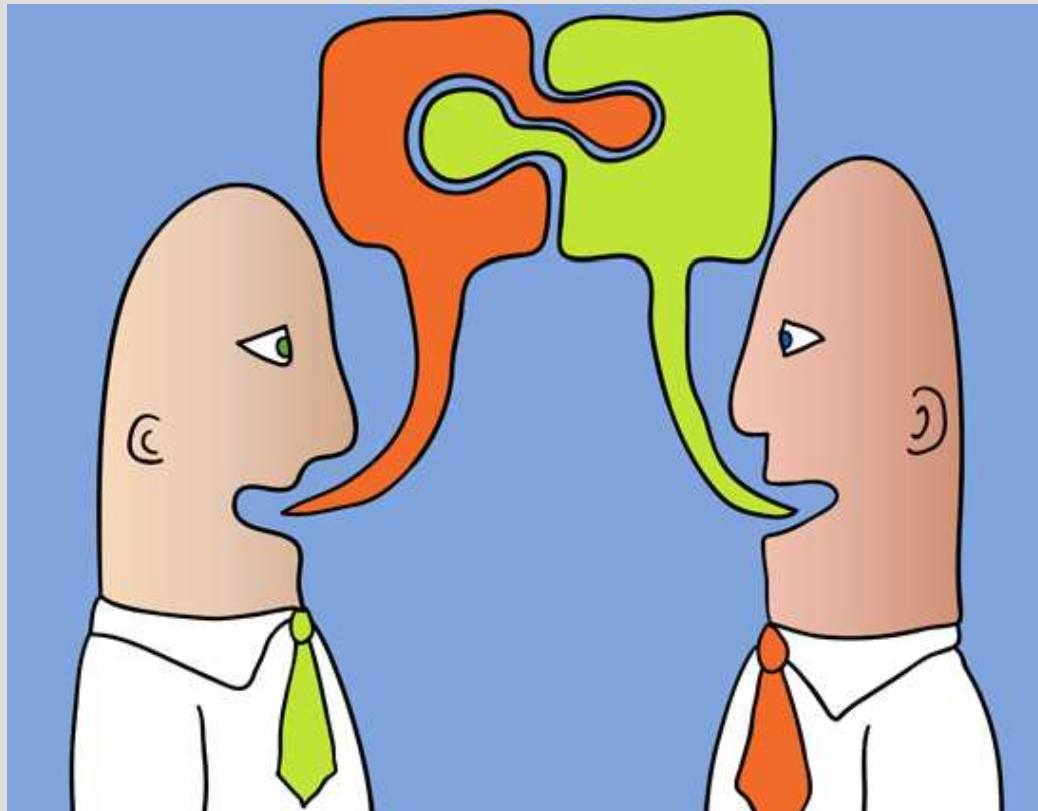
Language is often characterized as a 'tool' (e.g. Karl Bühler 1934)

Language is a tool for communication.

- ☐ Exchange ideas
- ☐ Ask question
- ☐ Make requests
- ☐ Express emotions
- ☐ Indicate doubt
- ☐ etc.

Language as a tool

Things talked about

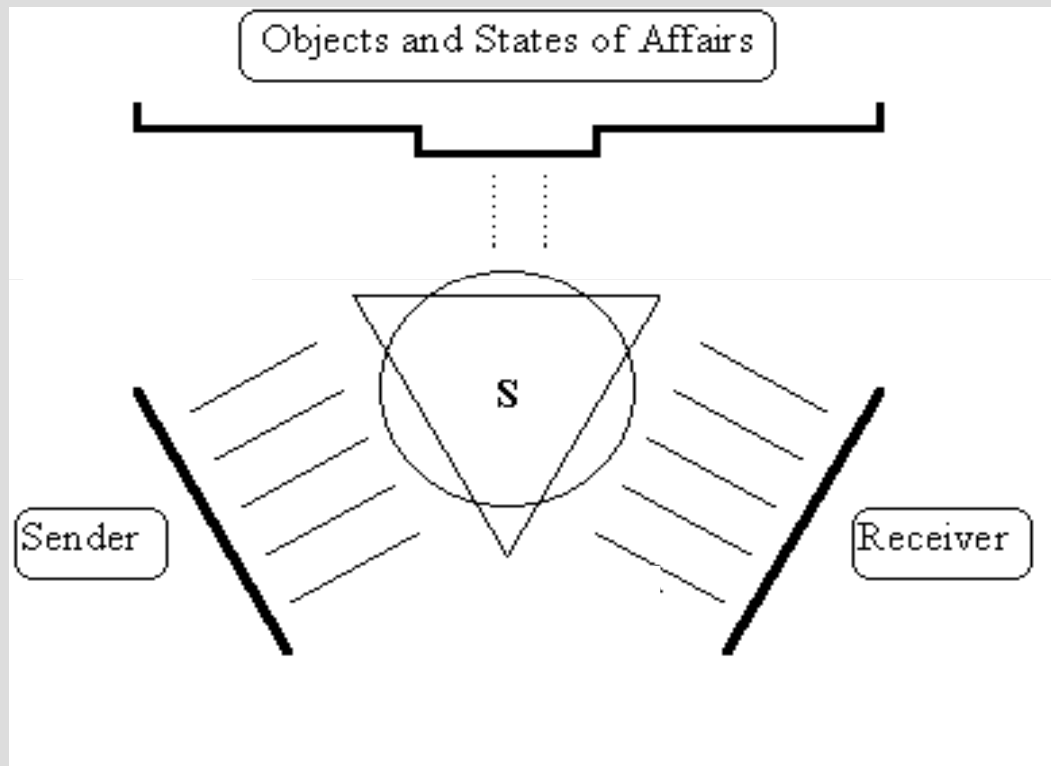


Speaker

Hearer

Communication
is triadic.

Language as a tool



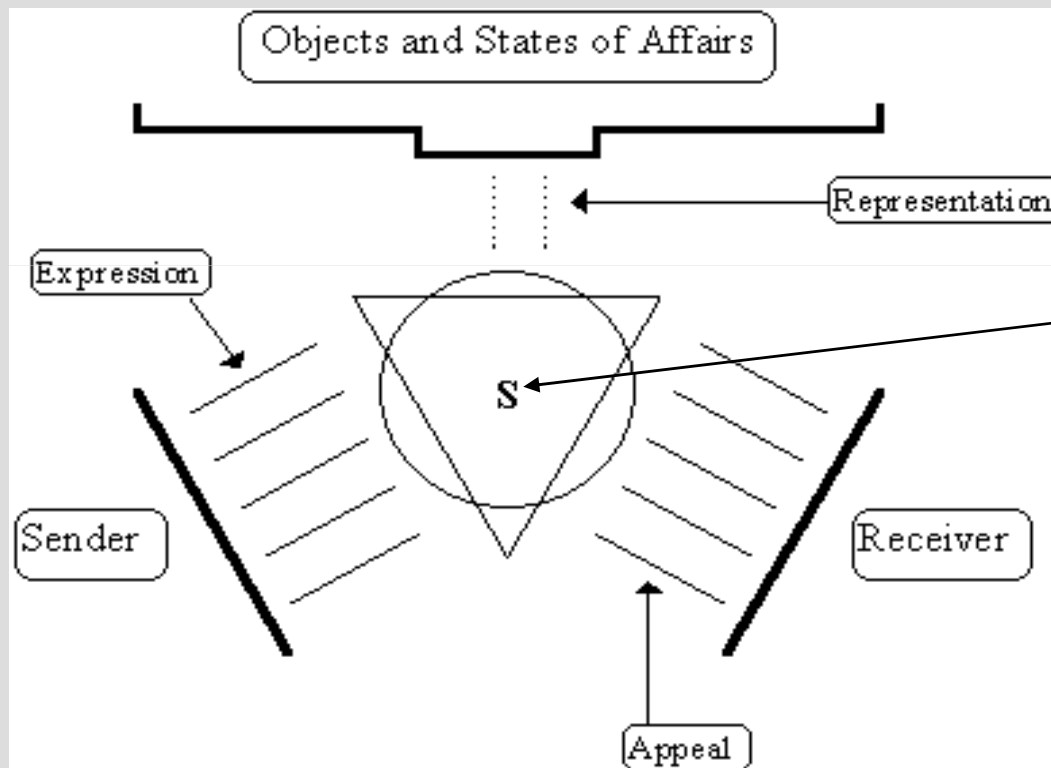
Karl Bühler (1934)
The organon model
of language

Language as a tool

The three basic functions of communication:

- ❑ Representation: Language is used to inform other people
- ❑ Appeal: Language is used to direct other people
- ❑ Expression: Language is used to express mental states

Language as a tool



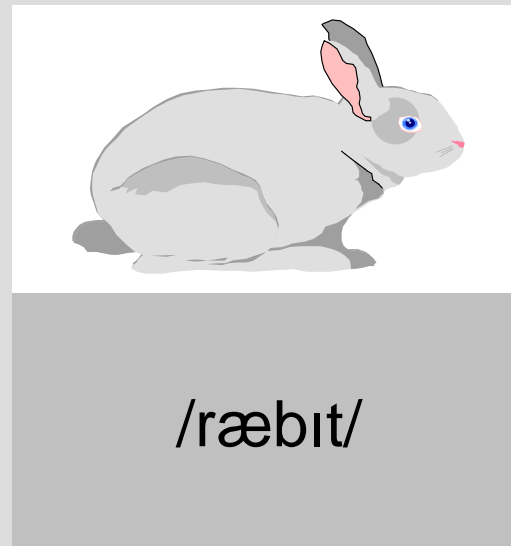
Language is a
system of signs

Language is a system of signs

A sign has a form and a function.



Traffic sign



Linguistic sign

Language is a system of signs

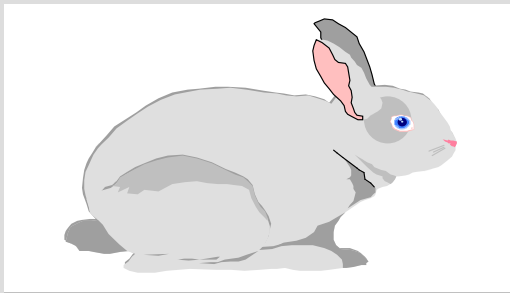
The combination of form and meaning is arbitrary.



iconic sign

Language is a system of signs

The combination of form and meaning is arbitrary.



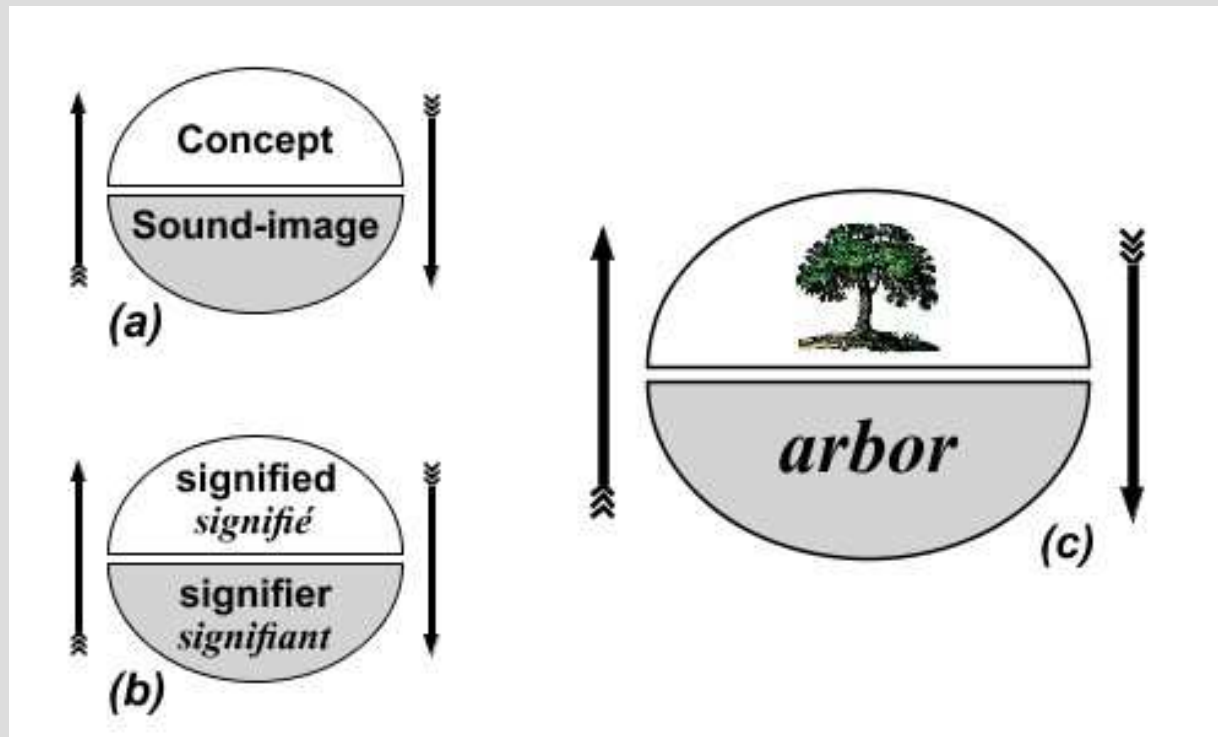
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cock-a-doodle-do

onomatopoeic
words

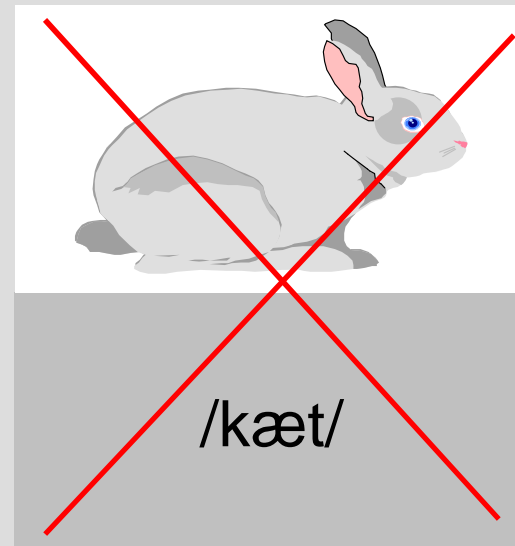
Language is a system of signs



Ferdinand de Saussure (1912)

Language is a system of signs

The combination between form and meaning must be **stable**, and it needs to be **shared** by all members of the speech community.



Language is a system of signs

The combination between form and meaning must be stable and shared by the community, but it is not completely invariable.



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[AE, BE]



/mɛʊs/
[Canadian E]

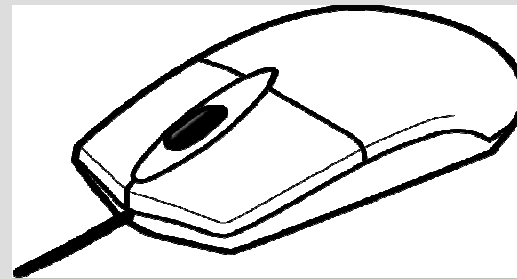
The form is variable.

Language is a system of signs

The combination between form and meaning must be stable and shared by the community, but it is not completely invariable.



/maʊs/



/maʊs/

The meaning is variable.

Motivations for linguistic form

The function of a tool motivates its form.

Is the form of language motivated?

In words the pairing of form and meaning is arbitrary, but grammatical structure is often motivated.

What do linguists mean when they speak of grammar?

Motivations for linguistic form

External grammar vs. Internal grammar

- ❑ External grammar: The codification of grammatical rules in a book.
- ❑ Internal grammar: The representation of linguistic patterns in the mind (= tacit knowledge).

The linguistic patterns of mental grammar are motivated.

Motivations for linguistic form

All languages have particular sentence types for:

- ❑ Statements
- ❑ Questions
- ❑ Requests/orders

- (1) Er hat in Jena studiert.
- (2) Gehst du dorthin?
- (3) Schließen Sie bitte die Tür.

- (1) He studied in Jena.
- (2) Will you go there?
- (3) Please close the door.

Motivations for linguistic form

All languages have to indicate grammatical relations.

- (1) The man saw the boy.
- (2) The boy saw the man.

- (3) Der Mann sah den Jungen.
- (4) Der Junge sah den Mann.

- (5) Den Mann sah der Junge.
- (4) Den Jungen sah der Mann.