

Goals

- describe some systems of communication used in the animal world
- evaluate the extent to which natural animal communications satisfy the design features of human language
- discuss the ability of members of other species to learn human language
- introduce some theories on the origins of human language

Tutorial Questions

a. In each of the pairs below, one statement is typical of human language (HL) while the other is more characteristic of animal communication (AC). Mark them HL and AC respectively.

i. The system produces an unlimited number of novel utterances. **HL**

ii. There is a closed repertory of distinctive utterances. **AC**

iii. The topic of communication is present in the immediate environment of the utterance. **AC**

iv. The system is acquired by learning. **HL**

v. The system is transmitted through genetic inheritance. **AC**

vi. The connection between signal and its meaning is arbitrary and conventional. **HL**

vii. The connection between signal and its meaning is iconic and natural. **AC**

b. Wolves express subtle emotions by different positions of ears, lips and tail.

There are 11 postures of the tail expressing things like self-confidence, lack of tension, depression, defensiveness, active submission etc. This is a complex system! Suppose there were a thousand different emotion wolves could express in this way. Do they have language similar to humans? If not, why not?

- NO No: emotion does not have a grammar or syntax, or a linear aspect as language does. It is not analytic -- it does not break down concepts into smaller pieces for combination and re-combination in different forms.

Tutorial Questions (cont)

- emotion is something we use to communicate key experiences with others. We do this through many non-linguistic means, including facial expression, touch, and tone
- but forcing emotion to fit into a linear, time-sequenced, grammatical linguistic format betrays the quality of the emotional experience itself, which is why linguistic names for emotions never quite capture them

Natural Communication Systems

- If animals have the capacity to acquire human language this would count as evidence that language is not a peculiarity of human beings.
- It would argue that language is **not encoded in a module in the brain** entirely separated from general intelligence, or that it is stored and processed separately in the brain.
- It could only be concluded that animals *lack the necessary genetic or neurological requirements*.
- If we can show that *non-human animal communication systems* exist that share the features of human language, and that our closest relative have systems that *most resemble human language*,
- this would count in favor of the **evolution of language from animal communication systems**, and that language differs in degree rather than kind from these other systems.
- not finding such evidence does not, however, argue against an evolutionary story: it may be that no living species are sufficiently close to us biologically to reveal the continuity



By junyitor

cheatography.com/junyitor/

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