

Arbitrary relation of form and meaning.

Arbitrariness

There is no 'natural' connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. The connection is quite arbitrary. We can't just look at different words, e.g. the Arabic word *and*, from its shape, determine that it has a natural and clear meaning any more than we can with its English translation form *dog*. The linguistic form has no natural or 'iconic' relationship with the animal hairy in the world. This aspect of the relationship between linguistic signs and objects in the world is described as **arbitrariness**.

There are some words in language with sounds that seem to 'echo' the sounds of objects or activities and therefore seem to have a less arbitrary connection. English examples are onomatopoeic words: *cuckoo*, *crash*, *slurp*, *squelch* or *whirr*. However, these words are fairly rare in human language. For the majority of animal signals, there does appear to be a clear connection between the conveyed message and the signal used to convey it. This impression we have of the non-arbitrariness of animal signalling may be closely connected to the fact that, for any animal, the set of signals used in communication is finite.

The sound a dog makes is represented by the English word *bow-wow*, the Balinese word *kong-kong*, the Armenian word *haf-haf*, and the Korean words *mung-mung* or *wang-wang*. This cross-linguistic variation is presumably not motivated by differences in the way dogs actually bark in different parts of the world.

The same thing can be observed when it comes to the word: *dog*. The word for 'dog' in other languages is: Armenian *shun*, Balinese *cicing*, Korean *gae*, Tagalog *aso*, etc. No common phonological pattern is to be found here.

Arbitrariness is one of the characteristics shared between all languages.

Words are arbitrary symbols that have no meaning in themselves. Meaning is from both in and among people. Meaning is found in what we agree to attached it to.

Sources:

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