

Basic concepts of linguistics

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Introduction to Linguistics

- Language and Linguistics
- Speech vs. Writing
- Approaches to language: Descriptive vs. Prescriptive
- Grammar and Grammar Levels
- Arbitrariness

Language & Linguistics

Language & Linguistics

- **Language** – a system that associates sounds/gestures with meanings in a way that uses words and sentences.
- **Linguistics** – the scientific study of human language. It tries:
 - first, to observe languages and to describe them accurately,
 - then, to find generalizations within what has been described,
 - finally, to draw conclusions about the general nature of human language

Speech vs Writing

Speech vs Writing: What is primary?

If linguistics studies language, what should it focus on?

- Speech?
- Writing?

Which one is the primary manifestation of language?

Speech vs Writing: Is writing primary?

- In comparison with spoken texts, written texts tend to
 - be more carefully worded
 - be better organized,
 - contain fewer errors, hesitations, and incomplete sentences,
- because writing is usually
 - planned in advance,
 - subject to fewer time constraints,
 - proofread, etc.

Is writing is primary?

- **Spelling is more uniform** across different individuals, places and times than is pronunciation.
 - However: *Swau lásku slawjk růži pěl – Růžinu gewil wonný wzdech. – Gezero hladké w křowjch stinných* [K.H.Mácha: Mág 1836]
 - However:
 - UK: *tyre, draught, colour, dialogue, penalise, centre, defence, . . .*
 - USA: *tire, draft, color, dialog, penalize, center, defense, . . .*
- Moreover: Is uniformity the same as primacy?

Is writing primary?

- Written texts last and can be preserved for a long time.
 - However: CDs, youtube . . . can preserve speech
- Writing styles change much more slowly than speech styles.
So writing seems more “permanent” and “authoritative”.
 - However: This can be is also disadvantage – writing lags behind the times.

Speech is primary

- Speech is older than writing
 - writing – (probably) Sumer (Mesopotamia, current Iraq) about 5,500 years ago.
 - language – probably exists for 40,000+ years
- No society uses only writing, many languages are not written
- Most people say more during one month than they write during their entire lives.
- Writing lacks intonation, stress, voice quality . . .
- We learn to speak before we learn to write
- Processing and production of written language is overlaid on the spoken language centers in the brain (plus certain other centers).

Speech is the primary manifestation
of language

Writing is a lossy encoding of speech

Descriptive vs Prescriptive Approach

Descriptive approach

Linguists

- observe and **describe** the language
- try to **discover** the principles that govern it
- attempt create a **model of speakers' mental grammar**
- accept as given the patterns speakers **actually use**
- accept different dialects and even variation within one dialect

Prescriptive approach

- Prescriptivists tell you **someone's idea** of what is “good” or “bad”.
- Prescriptive rules make a **value judgment** about the correctness of certain utterances and generally try to enforce a **single standard**.

English Prescriptive Rules

- Don't split infinitives; don't say:
to easily understand
- Don't end a sentence with a preposition; don't say
Where are you from?

Czech Prescriptive Rules

- Don't use *mistička*, use the correct *mištička* [1930's]
- Don't say *flaška* `bottle', say *láhev*
 - *Flaška* is from German,
 - and so is *taška* `bag' (which is considered correct)
 - and so is *láhev* ...
- Don't say *vyjímka*, use the correct *výjimka* `exception'
 - *vyjímat* `take out' > *výjimka* `exception'

Czech Prescriptive Rules

Proto je třeba jednoznačně odmítnout a do slušné společnosti nepouštět především hrůzy typu chromozóm či lýzozóm, neboť ty mohou užívat pouze málo gramotné osoby neznalé základu "sõma-sõmatos". Stejně odpudivá a nepřijatelná je ale např. i dizertace.

Jaroslav Hořejší: Pláč jazyka českého. 1 Feb 2010

<http://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jaroslav-horejsi.php?itemid=8790>

Prescriptive Approach

- The people who prescriptive grammar **make up the rules** of the grammar.
- So-called prescriptive grammar usually **focuses only on a few issues** and ignores the rest of the language. From the linguistic point of view, this is not grammar at all.

Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism

- In summary: Linguists **describe** language, they do **not prescribe** it.
- As a science, linguistics:
 - is not in the business of making value judgments about language use.
 - studies how language really is used and then attempts to **describe** the facts, in order to analyze and, eventually, explain them.

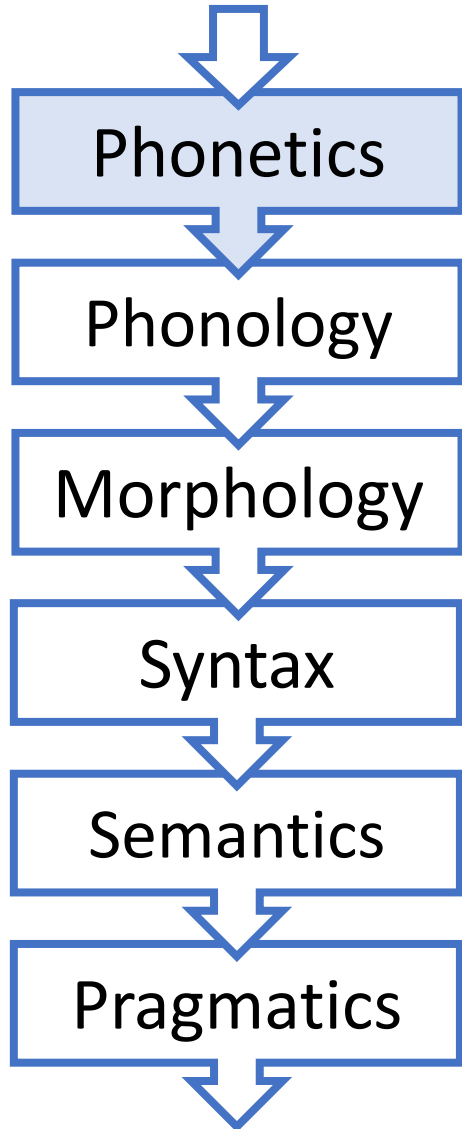
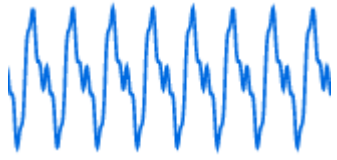
Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism: An Analogy

- Physicists:
 - don't complain that objects fall to earth
 - simply observe and describe the fact of falling, then try to discover the laws that are behind it.
- Linguists:
 - don't say that people shouldn't use *ain't* or *bysme* 'colloq. would_{1pl}'
 - simply observe that some people in certain situations do use *ain't* or *bysme*

Grammar & Levels of Grammar

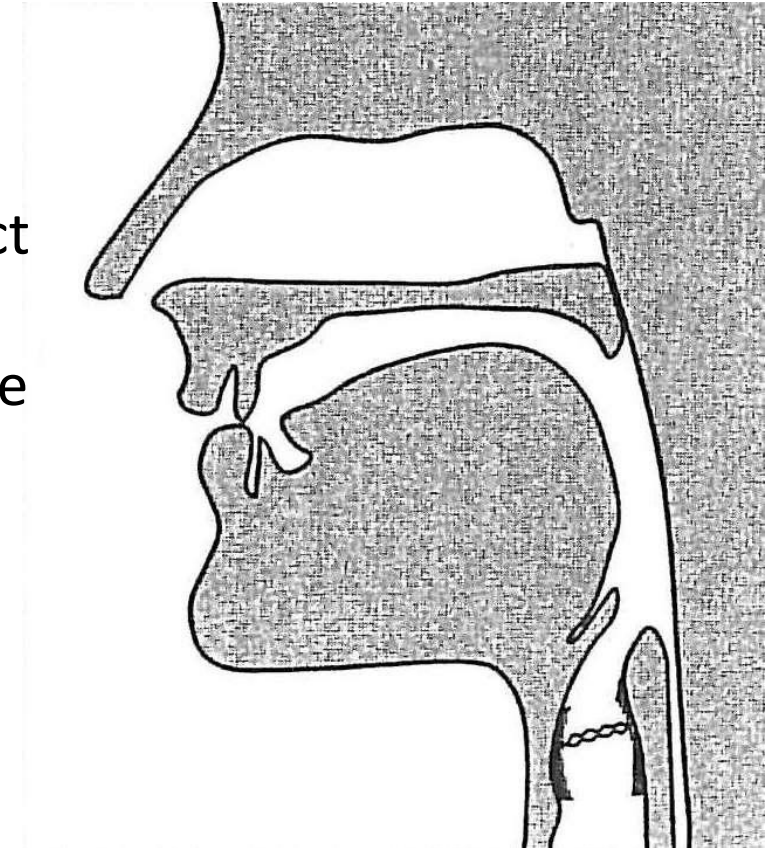
Grammar

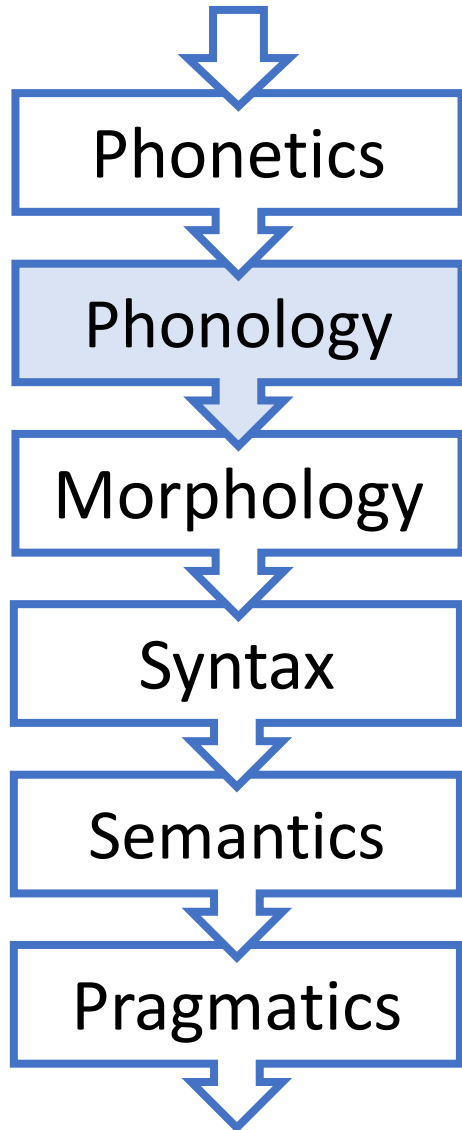
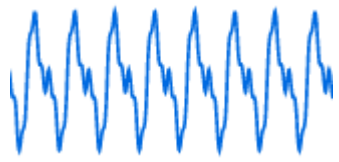
- **Grammar** – a language system, a set of principles (rules) that underlie a language.
- **Mental Grammar** – the knowledge of language that allows a person to produce and understand utterances



Phonetics – the production and perception of speech sounds as physical entities.

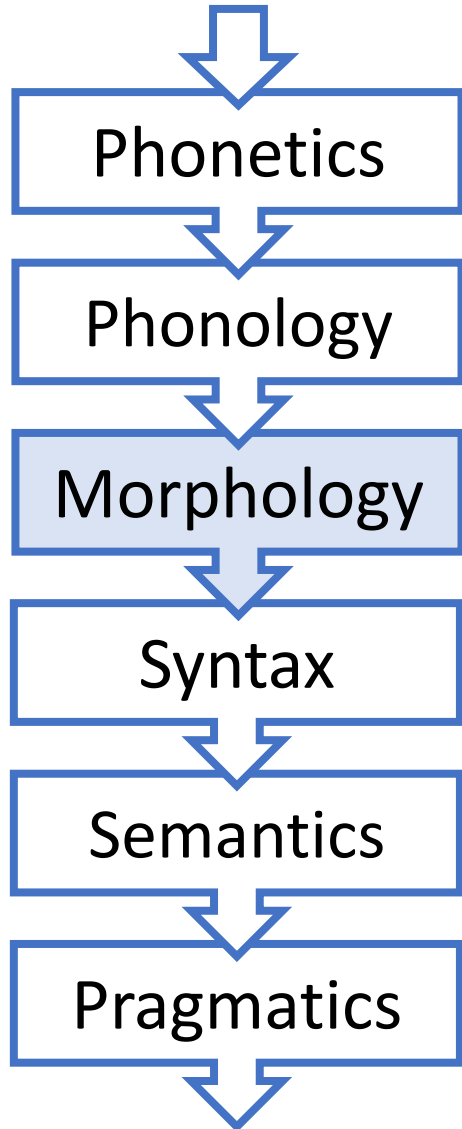
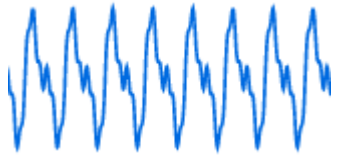
- [v] is pronounced by
 - bringing the lower lip into contact with upper teeth and
 - forcing air out of the mouth while
 - the vocal folds vibrate and
 - nasal cavity is closed off.





Phonology – the sound patterns/system of a particular language, language sounds as abstract entities

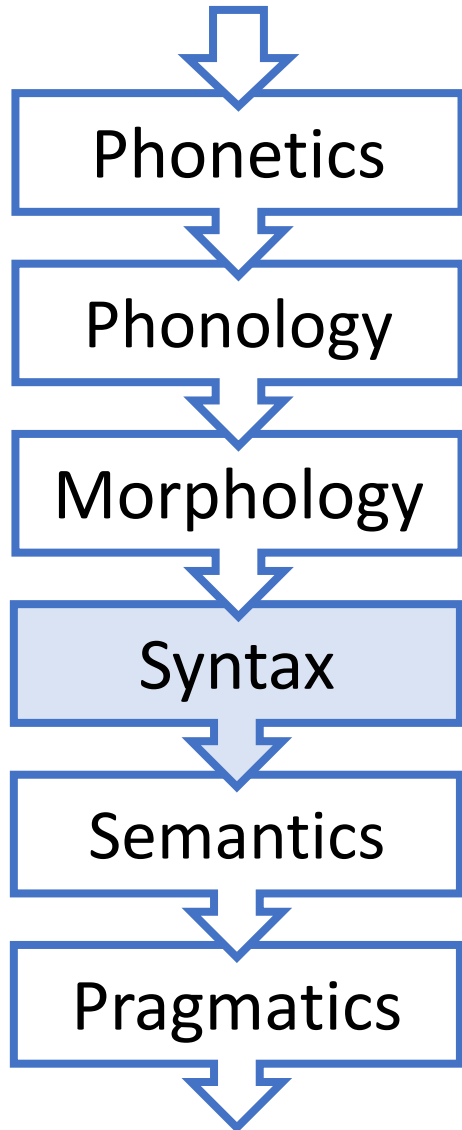
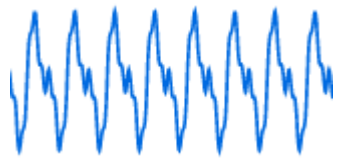
- Czech: a word never ends with a voiced obstruent *zubu* [zubu] ‘tooth_{gen}’ but *zub* [zup] ‘tooth_{nom}’
- English: a word never starts with [kn] while in German it is possible (e.g., *Knabe* ‘boy’)
- Setswana: a consonant is always followed by a vowel: the word for Christmas, from English, is pronounced [keresemese]



Morphology – the word structure and systematic relations between words.

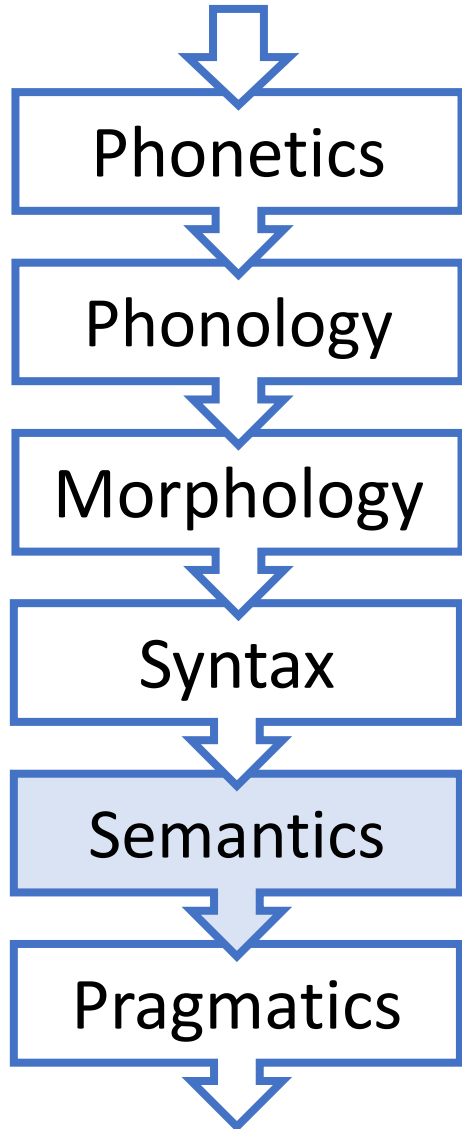
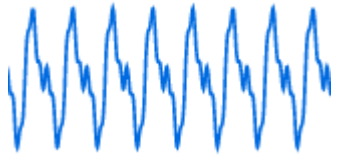
Morpheme – the smallest linguistic unit that has a meaning or grammatical function. Words are composed of morphemes (one or more):

- *Sing-er-s answer-ed un-kind-ly*
- *uč-i-tel-k-u* 'she-teacher_{acc}'



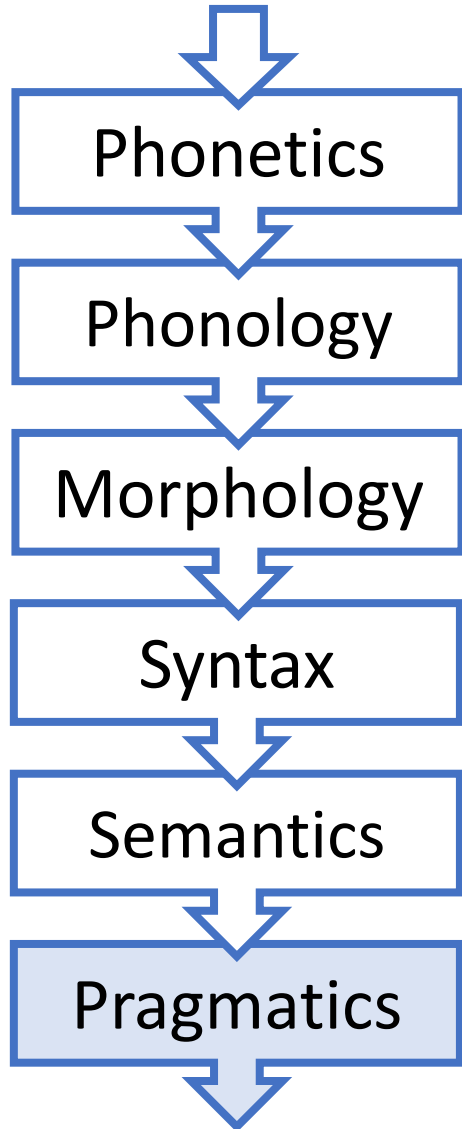
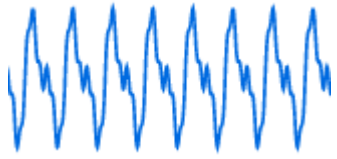
Syntax – phrase and sentence structure

- word order: *The book is on the table.* **Table book on is the the.*
 - agreement: *I am here.* **I are here.*
 - cases: *I like her.* **I like she.*
 - etc.
-
- An asterisk (*) preceding a sentence marks the sentence as ungrammatical, i.e., not used/accepted by most speakers of that language.



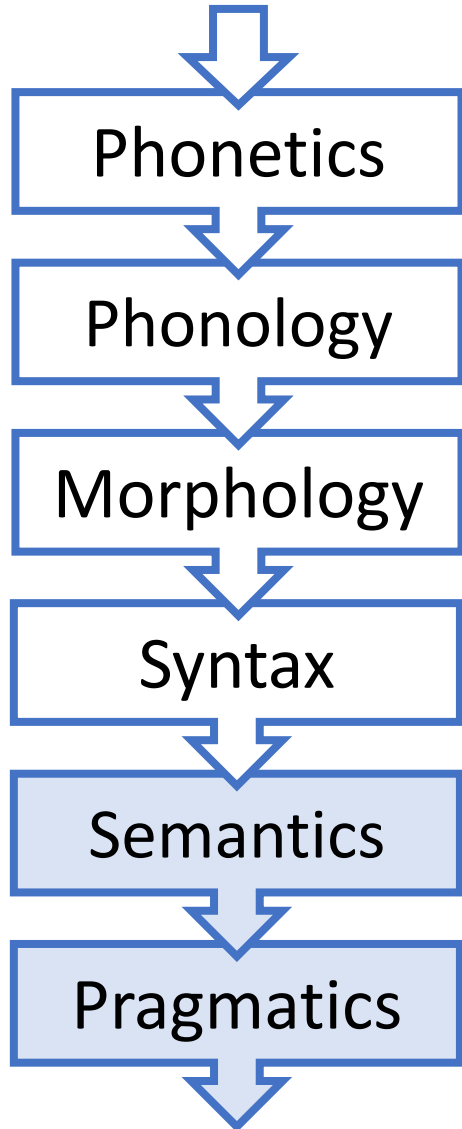
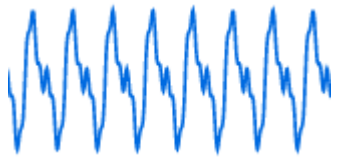
Semantics – the literal meaning of sentences, phrases, words and morphemes.

- What is the meaning of the word *vegetable*?
- How does the word order influence meaning of sentence in English?
 - *Tigers ate tourists.*
 - *Tourists ate tigers.*
- How about word order in Czech?



Pragmatics – language usage

- **Context** influences the interpretation of utterances – the same sentence can be used to do different things in different situations.
- *Gee, it's hot in here!*
- *The wash machine is broken.*

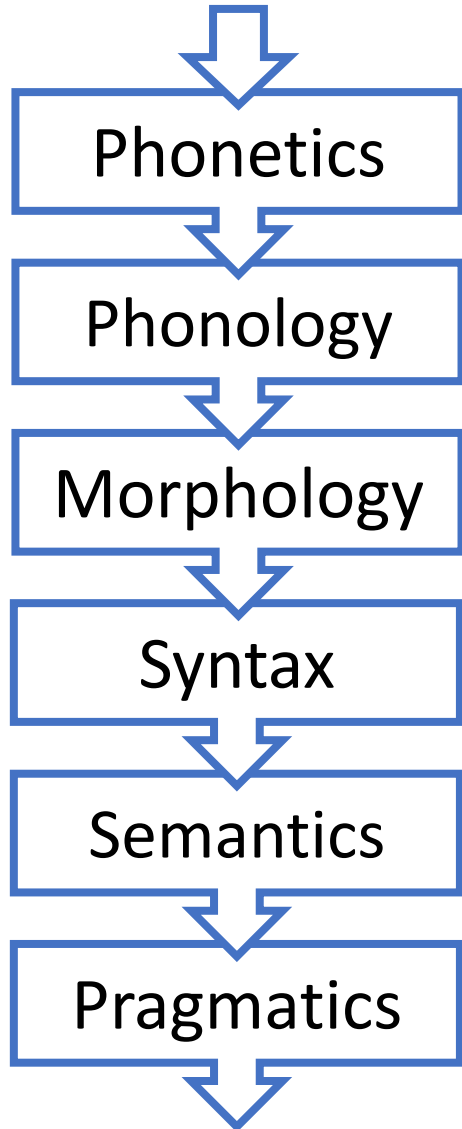
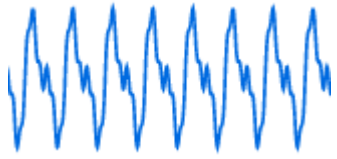


Pragmatics – language usage

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Simply put:

- semantics is the **literal** meaning and
- pragmatics is the **intended** meaning.



Phonetics

– speech sounds as physical entities

Phonology

– sound patterns

Morphology

– word structure

Syntax

– sentence structure

Semantics

– literal meaning

Pragmatics

– intended meaning

Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness

Meaning



Arbitrary / non-arbitrary

Form

Arbitrariness

Meaning



Form

Arbitrary

- the meaning is not deducible from the form
- the form is not deducible from the meaning
- form-meaning connection must be learned via memorization



Arbitrariness

Meaning



Form

Nonarbitrary:
The meaning is **derivable**
(at least partly) from the
form, and vice versa

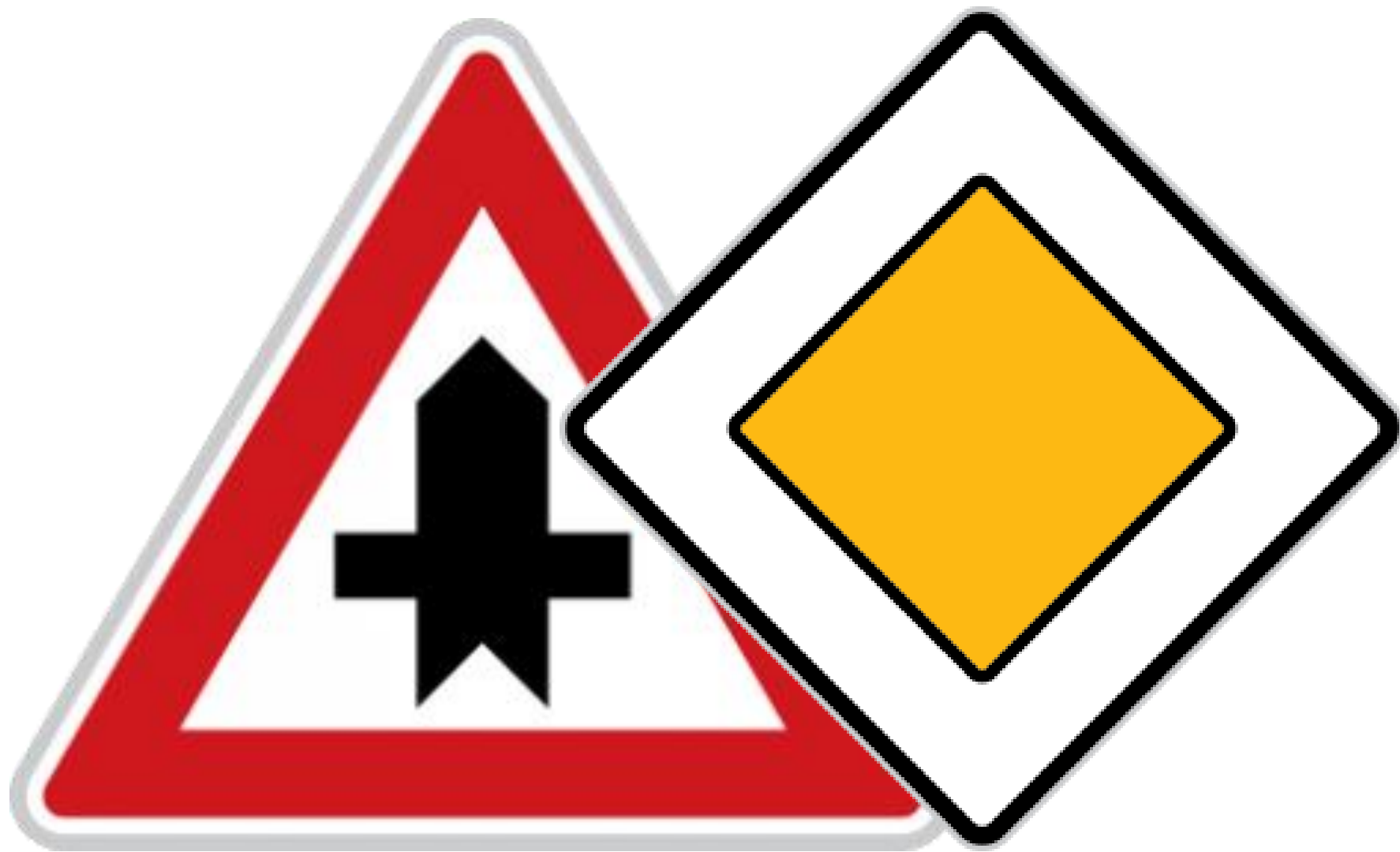








KONĚ





Language is overwhelmingly arbitrary

If language were not arbitrary, then:

- languages would use **the same words for the same thing**:
 - English *tree*, Czech *strom*, French *arbre*, German *Baum*, Japanese *ki*, Korean *namu*.
- there would be **just one language**
- word **forms would not change** over time.
 - Old English (before 1100) *hūs* → Modern English *house*
- word **meanings would not change** over time
 - Middle English (before 1500) *girle* 'child' → Modern English *girl*
 - Middle English *nice* 'ignorant' → Modern English *nice* 'pleasant'
 - Old Czech *letadlo* 'bird' → Modern Czech *letadlo* 'airplane'

Arbitrariness: Exceptions

Two limited and partial exceptions to the arbitrariness of language:

- Onomatopoeia
- Sound Symbolism

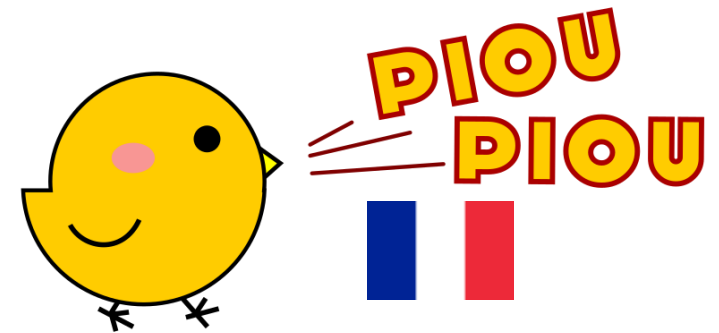
Arbitrariness: Exceptions

Onomatopoeia = words whose sound imitates the sound they denote, or a sound associated with something they denote.



Not entirely arbitrary.

Not entirely nonarbitrary: Different languages represent the same natural sounds in slightly different ways
(English *cock-a-doodle-doo* ≠ Czech *kykyryký*).



Arbitrariness: Exceptions

Sound symbolism refers to the very vague, elusive way in which certain sounds “feel” more appropriate for describing certain objects or meanings than do other sounds.

- the vowels [i] or [ɪ] seem to suggest smallness
teensy-weensy, wee, little, Tommy (vs. Tom), squeak
but: *big*
- to English speakers, *gl-* suggest brightness:
glint, glitter, gleam, glow
but: *glove, glue, glum, glop*

Language is overwhelmingly arbitrary