

So far:

- Language learning as a way to pass on knowledge over generations.
- Language learning as a way to pass on “biases” to the next generation.
- The specific language (or languages!) learned may influence cognition.

But what is it about language that matters?

Language is a shared symbol system!



- **Symbol** - something that is intended to *stand for* something else other than itself.
 - e.g. Words. The relationship between words and their meanings is (mostly) arbitrary.
 - Other examples?
- What does one need to learn a symbol system?
 - Chimps can learn lexical signs
 - ...but with some limitations

One theory of symbolic systems:

- **Dual representation** -- the ability to relate a real object and a symbol.
- Using a symbolic artifact requires dual representation.
- Increasing ability to achieve dual representation allows children to discover the abstract nature of various symbolic artifacts.

One example:
the development of Pretend Play

- Pretend familiar activities with real or realistic objects.
- True **symbolic play**- creating temporary symbols by using one object as if it were something other than itself.
- Combining complex actions into a coherent pretend scenario.
- Understanding the role of mental state on pretend play.
- Understanding that pretending is primarily a mental activity.

Scale Model Task



