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!

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.

• 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 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