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**Animal-communication**, as a system of signifiers operating within species-specific structures, must be understood not as expression but as formalized difference. each signal—whether a bee’s movement, a bird’s call, or a primate’s gesture—is a sign whose value arises not from its physical nature but from its position in a relational network. the signifier, the observable act, is arbitrary; its connection to the signified, the intended outcome, is established by convention within the collective system of the group. this system, langue, exists independently of any individual performance, parole. one bee does not invent the dance; it deploys a code inherited, repeated, and differentiated by position and timing.

first, consider the honeybee. its waggle dance is not an imitation of flight, nor an emotional display of excitement. it is a syntagmatic chain: the angle of the straight run relative to the vertical indicates direction to the sun; the duration of the vibration encodes distance. these are not metaphors for the flower’s location—they are fixed, arbitrary markers. a longer vibration does not feel more urgent; it signifies greater distance by rule. other bees interpret the sign not through empathy but through learned recognition of its position within the system. they do not know the flower. they know the sign.

then, observe the vervet monkey. its alarm calls—distinct for eagles, leopards, and snakes—are not cries of fear, but differentiated signs. each call triggers a specific behavioral response: look up, run into bushes, stand bipedal. the call’s acoustic shape bears no natural resemblance to the predator. the signifier is arbitrary. yet within the group, the signified is fixed. to produce the eagle call when a snake appears is to violate the system. the error does not confuse emotion—it disrupts function. the system requires consistency. variation is error, not innovation.

but systems differ across species. the song of the nightingale is not a single sign but a sequence of signs arranged in paradigms. each phrase is chosen from a repertoire of possible units. the bird does not improvise freely; it selects from pre-established elements, combining them according to rules that govern sequence and repetition. the meaning is not in the emotion of the song, but in its structure: a male’s

success in mating correlates with the complexity of his syntagmatic arrangements, not with the volume or pitch alone. the system rewards precision of form, not intensity of feeling.

some signals are visual, not acoustic. the tail-flag of a white-tailed deer is not a gesture of warning. it is a signifier that functions only when raised suddenly, against the background of stillness. the color and motion form a sign whose value is derived from contrast. without the context of motionlessness, the signal loses its function. the signified—danger—is not communicated by the tail itself, but by its deviation from the norm. the system relies on difference. absence of motion is as meaningful as its presence.

in aquatic species, the patterns of dolphin clicks are not calls for companionship. they are modulated pulses whose timing, frequency, and repetition form a coded sequence. each sequence corresponds to a discrete object or action within the group’s environment: a specific fish, a change in depth, the approach of another pod. the clicks are not expressive. they are functional indicators within a synchronized code. the same sequence, repeated in the same context, yields the same response. the system does not evolve through sentiment. it stabilizes through repetition and constraint.

this is not language as humans conceive it—no syntax of recursion, no displacement in time or space. yet it is a system. it operates synchronically. its rules are internal, not derived from external logic. each species maintains its own langue, closed and self-referential. a bee’s dance cannot be translated into a monkey’s call, not because the meanings are too complex, but because the sign systems are structurally incommensurable. the signifier in one system bears no relation to the signifier in another. meaning is internal to the system.

you can notice this in captivity. a bird raised without exposure to its species’ song will never produce it correctly. it does not lack desire. it lacks the system. the structure must be inherited, not imagined. the signified does not emerge from within the individual. it is imposed by the collective.

but what happens when a signal is misused? when a monkey gives the snake alarm for a falling branch? the system does not collapse. it corrects. the error is noted. the signal’s value

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is reaffirmed through its deviation. meaning is not fixed by nature. it is maintained by recurrence.

so if communication is a system of signs, and signs derive value from difference, then what is the limit of such systems? can a signal ever mean more than the structure allows? can a new sign be added, or must all meaning remain within the boundaries of the inherited code?

*in voce* a.saussure

**Artificial-language**, a system of symbols governed by explicit formal rules, is constructed not through organic usage but by deliberate enumeration of syntax and semantics. It may be observed that such languages do not arise from communal practice, nor do they evolve through historical contingency; rather, they are defined by a finite set of axioms, a vocabulary of primitive signs, and transformation procedures that determine well-formed expressions. The validity of a string within such a system is not determined by frequency of utterance, but by adherence to recursively specifiable formation rules. Consider a language in which the only primitive symbols are 'P' and 'Q', and the sole rule of formation states that any string of the form  $P^nQ^m$  is well-formed if and only if  $n$  and  $m$  are positive integers and  $n = m$ . In this system, 'PQ' and 'PPQQ' are valid; 'PQQ' and 'PPQ' are not. No speaker need ever utter these strings for them to possess formal status. Their legitimacy is derived from the structure of the system alone.

The purpose of such constructions is not to facilitate communication between persons, but to serve as models for the investigation of logical consequence, deductive closure, and mechanical computability. One may construct a language whose grammar is isomorphic to a finite automaton, wherein each symbol transitions the system from one state to another according to a fixed transition table. Such a machine, though devoid of intention, can accept or reject strings based solely on the configuration of symbols it encounters. The language thus defined is not spoken, but computed. Its boundaries are not cultural, but algorithmic.

It may further be observed that the semantics of an artificial-language are not anchored in reference to external objects, but in interpretation functions defined over the syntactic domain. A symbol may be assigned a truth value under a valuation function, or a term may be mapped to a member of a domain of discourse. These mappings are not discovered; they are stipulated. The meaning of a symbol resides not in its use, but in its position within a formal model. The sentence 'PQ' does not denote a thing in the world; it denotes a member of the set of well-formed strings under the rule set. Its interpretation is a function, not an intuition.

The development of these systems in the

early twentieth century paralleled advances in symbolic logic and the formalization of arithmetic. Systems such as those proposed by Frege and Hilbert sought to reduce mathematical reasoning to purely syntactic operations, wherein proof sequences were generated by rule application alone, independent of intuitive understanding. An artificial-language, in this context, becomes a device for isolating the mechanical aspects of reasoning. A proof is a sequence of strings, each derived from prior ones by application of a rule, terminating in a designated axiom or theorem. The entire process requires no understanding, only following. The system operates as a Turing machine operates: reading symbols, consulting a state table, writing new symbols, shifting the tape.

It is possible to define a language in which every sentence is a well-formed formula of first-order predicate logic, with a finite set of constants, variables, and quantifiers. A grammar may be specified to generate only those formulas that are logically valid, or those that are satisfiable under certain interpretations. Such languages may be used to explore decidability: whether a procedure exists that, given any string, can determine in finite time whether it belongs to the language. The existence of such a procedure is not guaranteed. In some systems, no algorithm can decide membership for all possible strings. This limitation is not a flaw, but a feature: it reveals the boundaries of computability.

One may construct a language whose vocabulary consists entirely of numerals and operators, and whose formation rules mirror those of arithmetic. Addition may be represented by a binary operation symbol, concatenation by sequence, and equality by a relation. The sentence ' $2+3=5$ ' is not a statement about apples or stones; it is a string generated by applying the rule that, if  $x$  and  $y$  are numerals, then ' $x+y$ ' is a term, and if  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  are terms, then ' $t_1=t_2$ ' is a sentence if and only if their values are identical under the standard interpretation. The truth of the sentence is not empirical; it is derivable.

The artificial-language, therefore, is not a tool for human interaction, but an instrument for examining the limits of formal systems. It reveals what can be computed without reference to meaning, what can be decided without reference to context, and what remains undecidable

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even when every rule is precisely given. It is a mirror held to the architecture of thought itself, not its expression.

One may ask: if a system can generate all and only the valid expressions of a language, and if no human ever speaks or comprehends those expressions, does the language exist? Or does existence require an interpreter?

*in voce a.turing*

**Babel**, a system of divergent signifiers within a shared linguistic structure, emerges when the arbitrariness of the sign becomes unmoored from mutual recognition. In any multilingual community, the same referent—such as a tree, a river, or a command—carries multiple signifiers, each bound to a distinct linguistic system. These signifiers do not converge; they coexist without correspondence. First, a child in Vienna hears “Baum,” while a child in Prague hears “strom,” and a child in Budapest hears “fa.” Each learns the sound-image linked to the concept through social usage, not through intrinsic logic. Then, when these children meet, their signifiers fail to align. The signified remains identical, yet the signifiers remain distinct. No one forgets or misremembers; the difference is structural.

You can notice this in imperial administrations where officials issue orders in French, clerks record them in German, and citizens receive them in Slavic dialects. Each layer of the sign chain operates independently. The meaning intended is not lost; it is simply inaccessible to those who lack the code. Language does not break down. It differentiates. The confusion arises not from error, but from the absence of a shared system of differential relations. The telegraph operator in Constantinople receives “water” in Arabic script, translates it into Greek letters, and sends it as Latin alphabetic characters—each transcription a separate signifier, none equivalent to the others. The message is transmitted, yet understanding remains fragmented.

This is not a failure of communication. It is the condition of language itself: a network of differences without fixed reference. Every sign gains value only through contrast with other signs within its system. When systems overlap without mutual adaptation, their signifiers remain opaque to one another. The diversity is not chaotic. It is systematic. You may ask: if all languages are systems of difference, why do some groups perceive their differences as barriers? The answer lies not in language, but in the social relations that privilege one system over another. Yet even then, the structure remains unchanged. The signifiers still differ. The signifieds still coincide. The system does not collapse. It simply separates.

What happens when a signifier, once isolated,

begins to circulate without its original system?

*in voce a.saussure*

**Communication**, that system of differential signs through which meaning is produced and sustained within a social structure, operates not by the transmission of ideas but by the arrangement of differences. The sign, constituted by the union of a signifier and a signified, is arbitrary: the sound pattern “tree” bears no natural relation to the concept of a tall woody plant. Yet within a linguistic community, this union becomes fixed, habitual, and indispensable. One does not communicate by invoking inner states or external objects; one invokes signs that derive value solely from their contrast with other signs. The word “cat” gains its identity not from the animal it denotes, but from its distinction from “bat,” “cap,” “cot,” and “kat.”

First, a child hears the sequence of sounds “p-a-p-a.” Then, through repeated exposure within structured contexts—such as the utterance preceding the offering of food or the arrival of a figure at the door—the child learns that this sequence corresponds to a stable element in the system of familial relations. The signifier “papa” is not intrinsically tied to the person; it is tied to its position relative to other signifiers: “mama,” “grandma,” “uncle.” The meaning does not reside in the voice or the face. It resides in the structure that differentiates one term from another.

But the same signifier may shift meaning across systems. In one community, “dog” refers to a domesticated quadruped; in another, it may signify a term of contempt. The signified is not fixed by nature; it is determined by the synchronic system in which it functions. A child raised among speakers of French hears “chien” in equivalent contexts and learns that “chien” and “dog” are not the same sign, though they may denote the same referent. The referent is irrelevant. Only the relational position within the langue matters.

The parole—the actual utterance spoken, written, or signed—is the fleeting instance in which the system is activated. It is variable, imperfect, and individual. Yet without the underlying langue, parole would be noise. One may pronounce “tree” with a lisp, spell it “trea,” or whisper it under breath. None of these alter the structural identity of the sign within the system. The system endures. The instance passes.

Consider the game of chess. The knight moves in an L-shape. Its meaning is not derived

from its shape, its material, or the player’s intention. It is derived from its difference from the bishop, the rook, the pawn. A knight is what it is because it is not those other pieces. So too with language. The sign is a node in a network of absences. Its value is negative: defined by what it is not.

A person may speak the same word with joy, anger, or indifference. The emotional tone alters the parole, but not the langue. The signifier remains unchanged. The signified remains unchanged. Only the performance shifts. The system does not care whether the speaker is happy or tired. It cares only whether the sign is used correctly according to its differential relations.

You can notice this when learning a new language. You hear words. You try to map them to your own internal concepts. But the mappings fail. Why? Because the system of distinctions differs. In English, “light” may mean not heavy or not dark. In another language, these may be two entirely separate signs. The error lies not in perception, but in the assumption that meaning is universal. Meaning is local. Meaning is structural.

The same sign may be used daily without being understood. A child repeats “why” without grasping its function in the system of questioning. An adult says “sorry” without intending remorse. The sign persists. The system persists. The individual does not control it. The system controls the individual.

What happens when a new sign enters the system? When “selfie” or “google” becomes part of the lexicon? The system adjusts. Other signs shift. “Picture” is no longer identical to “selfie.” “Search” is no longer synonymous with “google.” The structure reconfigures. The old values are redistributed.

communication, then, is not expression. It is differentiation. It is not connection. It is structure. It is not thought made audible. It is sound made meaningful by its place among other sounds.

How far can the system extend before it dissolves into contradiction?

*in voce a.saussure*

**Definition**, that word we use to pin down meaning, often hides the movement beneath. We say “a dog is a mammal with four legs and a tail,” and think we have captured it. But then we meet a dog without a tail, or a dog born with three legs — and still we call it dog. What held the word firm? Not the features, but the use. One says “dog” when the animal barks at the postman, when it wags its tail at the door, when it lies beneath the table during dinner. The word lives in these acts.

We call a whale a fish in one context, a mammal in another — what does this reveal about our need for classification? In the fishmonger’s stall, the whale’s meat is grouped with cod and haddock. In the biology classroom, its lungs, its warm blood, its care for young mark it apart. The definition changes with the game. There is no single rule that binds all uses. Instead, a network of similarities overlaps and crisscrosses — family resemblances, one might call them. The child points at a puppy and says “dog,” not because it matches a list, but because it responds to the same calls, the same gestures, the same tones of voice.

A child learns “chair” by sitting, by being told “no” when it climbs on the table, by seeing others rest upon it. Later, it learns that a stool is a chair, that a bench is not, that a rock can be a chair if one sits on it in the garden. The boundary is not drawn by essence, but by practice. We do not define “chair” to ourselves; we use it. The definition is not a mirror held up to the object, but a rule in a game — one that shifts with the players, the place, the purpose.

Consider the word “game.” We say chess is a game, football is a game, solitaire is a game. But what do they have in common? Not all involve competition. Not all involve rules as rigid as those of chess. Some involve luck. Some involve no objects at all — the game of pretending, the game of hide-and-seek played with silence. We do not find a single property common to all, yet we call them all games. Why? Because the word is used in similar ways, in similar forms of life. The definition is not a boundary drawn in stone; it is a thread pulled through a fabric of actions.

One says “justice” in court, in protest, in a parent’s decision about who gets the last apple. The word holds no fixed shape. Its meaning does not reside in a dictionary entry, but in the

way it is spoken, the tone, the silence that follows, the action it moves. To define “justice” is not to list its properties, but to observe the grammar of its use: when it is invoked, when it is denied, when it is questioned.

We speak of “time” as if it were something we can hold — a river, a clock, a measurement. Yet in the waiting room, time drags. In the moment of laughter, it vanishes. In grief, it thickens. The definition of time is not found in physics alone, but in the ways we speak of waiting, of hurry, of memory. The word does not describe an object; it directs attention, structures expectation, shapes memory.

What of “I”? I say “I am tired,” “I see the sky,” “I remember.” Each use is different. The “I” in “I see the sky” points to a perspective. The “I” in “I remember” points to a continuity. The “I” in “I am tired” points to a state felt in the body. One does not define “I” by what it refers to — for what is the referent? A body? A soul? A voice? The word works only in the grammar of self-expression, where its meaning is not fixed, but enacted.

We are tempted to think that behind every word lies a clear thing — a definition, a core, a hidden essence. But look closer. The word is not a label stuck on an object. It is a gesture. It is a movement in a language-game. To define is not to capture, but to trace — to follow the threads of usage, to watch how the word breathes in different contexts.

We say “red” to the apple, to the fire engine, to the sunset, to the blush on a cheek. What do these share? Not hue alone — for the red of the apple fades under dusk, the red of the fire engine glows under noon. We call them red because we point, because we react, because we have learned to respond in the same way. The definition is not in the wavelength, but in the practice.

And what of the word “meaning” itself? When we ask “What does this word mean?” we are not asking for a translation. We are asking: how is this word used? How does it function here? What action does it set in motion?

definition — is it a cage, or a path?

*in voce* a.wittgenstein

**Dialogue**, that living exchange between minds, begins not in silence but in question. Socrates walks the Agora, sandals dusted with Athenian earth, and stops a young man who boasts he knows justice. “Tell me,” he says, “what is justice?” The boy answers quickly: “Justice is helping friends and harming enemies.” Socrates nods, then asks, “What if a friend is unjust? Should we help him still?” The boy hesitates. “Perhaps not.” “Then your rule falters,” says Socrates. “What remains of justice when it cannot be applied consistently?”

First, the boy offers an example from chariot racing: “The just man wins the prize by outmaneuvering the others.” Socrates replies, “Then the just man is like a thief who steals wisely?” The boy blushes. He did not mean that. “But is not the just man wise in action?” Socrates presses. “If he steals, is he not acting unjustly?” The boy falls quiet. He thought he knew. Now he wonders.

Then, another joins them—a carpenter who has built altars for the gods. “I make what is ordered,” he says. “The just man does what the law commands.” Socrates turns to him: “What if the law commands something unjust? Must the just man obey?” The carpenter frowns. “The law is made by the many. They cannot be wrong.” “But,” says Socrates, “the many once voted to condemn the wise. Was that just?” The carpenter looks at his hands, calloused from wood and iron. He says nothing.

But why do we speak at all? Not to win, not to impress, but to uncover. The boy had an opinion. The carpenter had a habit. Neither had examined them. Socrates does not teach. He draws out. He asks: “Do you believe this because it is true, or because you have always heard it?” The boy replies, “I do not know.” That is the first step. *Aporia*—the quiet shock of realizing one does not know.

We hear many voices in the city. The poet sings of honor. The politician speaks of power. The merchant counts his coins. Each claims to know the good. But when questioned, their answers break like pottery under pressure. “Is courage simply standing firm?” asks Socrates of a soldier. “Yes,” answers the man. “Then what of the man who stands firm because he is mad? Is he courageous?” The soldier looks away. “I did not think of that.”

Dialogue does not end in certainty. It ends in

clarity of ignorance. The boy once thought justice was a rule. Now he sees it is a question. The carpenter thought law was truth. Now he wonders if truth must be tested. The soldier thought courage was boldness. Now he sees it may be wisdom.

You can notice this: when someone speaks with authority, ask them to explain. When they give an example, ask if it holds in all cases. When they say “everyone knows,” ask who “everyone” is. Truth is not found in agreement. It is found in the motion of the mind, testing, turning, refusing easy answers.

Socrates never writes his answers. He walks. He asks. He waits. He lets the other think. The Agora is full of men who say they know. Few are willing to be shown they do not. Yet it is only in that admission—the quiet, painful, honest admission—that inquiry begins.

Is knowledge something you own, or something you pursue? Is it found in what you say, or in how you question? And when no answer remains—when all your certainties have dissolved—what do you do then?

*in voce a.plato*

**Grammar**, as a system of differential relations within langue, establishes the conditions under which signs acquire value through mutual opposition rather than through reference to external reality. Each grammatical form—whether case, tense, or mood—derives its identity not from any intrinsic property but from its position relative to others in the structure. The past tense, for instance, does not signify time by virtue of a natural connection to events; it gains its function solely through its contrast with the present and future forms within the linguistic system. These distinctions are arbitrary in origin, yet they are rigorously maintained by the collective usage of a speech community. The speaker, in parole, may utter countless variations—some deviant, some innovative—but only those that conform to the underlying synchronic system are recognized as meaningful. The grammatical framework does not prescribe how language must be used in daily speech; it defines the network of differences that make communication possible at all.

Consider the pronoun “he.” Its value is not determined by the physical entity it denotes, nor by any inherent quality of the sound sequence /hi:/. Rather, “he” exists as a sign because it differs from “she,” “it,” “they,” and “I.” These elements form a paradigmatic axis where each term is defined by its absence from the others. To alter one term is to reconfigure the entire structure. The same applies to verb conjugation: the form “runs” derives its grammatical force not from the action it describes but from its contrast with “run,” “ran,” and “running.” These forms do not represent isolated units; they are nodes in a relational field. The system operates silently, invisibly, beneath the surface of utterance. It does not announce itself in the way a rule might be taught; it is felt only through the impossibility of its absence.

The speaker does not choose grammatical forms freely. They are constrained by the internal logic of the system, which predates any individual utterance and persists beyond it. A child learning language does not construct grammar from observation alone; they internalize a structure that already exists as a social fact. The signifier and the signified are bound together by convention, not by necessity. There is no reason why the sound pattern “cat” should sig-

nify the feline animal, yet in the system of English, this relation is fixed. To speak is to navigate a pre-established grid of differences, where meaning emerges not from content but from position. This is why grammatical errors are not merely deviations from usage—they are disruptions of value, instances in which the relational integrity of the system collapses.

Language, as a social institution, is not the sum of individual acts of speech. Grammar is the invisible architecture that renders parole interpretable. It is not learned through imitation alone, nor is it imposed by authority. It is the condition of possibility for any linguistic exchange. The same grammatical structure may underlie wildly different utterances: “The wind blows,” “The child sleeps,” “The river flows.” Each sentence is unique in parole, yet each depends on the same system of syntactic and morphological relations. The system does not change with each utterance. It endures.

Yet the system is not static in its effects. It evolves not through the addition of new forms, but through shifts in the relative value of existing ones. A category may lose its distinctiveness; a distinction may become blurred. These are not errors. They are reconfigurations. The value of a grammatical form is always relational, always contextual, always dependent on its contrast with other forms within the same system.

What then determines which differences endure, and which dissolve? Is grammar a mirror of thought, or a mold that shapes it?

*in voce a.saussure*

**Ineffable**, a word we use when we feel language has failed us—but what has really failed? We say, “I cannot say how I feel,” and think we point to something hidden, something deeper than words. But let us look closer. When a child says, “I am in pain,” we do not ask for a description of the pain. We respond. We hold their hand. We do not need the pain described. We know the grammar of this utterance. It is not a report. It is an expression. Now, if someone else says, “He is in pain,” we look for signs: tears, grimacing, withdrawal. The grammar is different. One is not a description of the other. We are not translating inner states. We are playing different language games.

You can notice this in a room full of people. One says, “I love her.” Another says, “She is loved.” The first is not a report about a feeling. It is an action. It is a gesture. It may be a promise. It may be a plea. It may be noise. But it is not a description of an inner object. We do not point to the love, as if it were a thing in the mind. We point to the hand holding, the voice trembling, the silence after a long day. The word “love” does not name a substance. It is used in a thousand ways. To say it is ineffable is to mistake the variety of use for a mystery beyond language.

Try this: say the word “red” to someone who has never seen color. Can you explain red to them? You cannot. But you do not say red is ineffable. You say they lack the training, the context, the practice. You show them a red apple, a red card, a red sky at dusk. You do not try to describe the essence of red. You teach the use. Language is a form of life. It is not a mirror of inner realms. It is a tool, shaped by how we live together.

When someone says, “The beauty of the sunset cannot be put into words,” think: what are they doing? They are not describing a property of the sky. They are refusing to continue speaking. They are stopping. They are tired. They are moved. They are inviting you to look too. But the sunset is not ineffable. The word “beautiful” is being used here in a way that does not invite further description. It is not a failure of language. It is a pause in the game.

We are tempted to say: there must be something beyond words, because I feel things I cannot say. But what do we mean by “feel things”? We mean: we use words in ways that do not

fit the model of naming objects. We say “I am afraid” and we do not mean: I am having an inner sensation called fear. We mean: I am trembling. I cannot move. I do not want to be alone. The feeling is not inside. The feeling is in the trembling, the silence, the looking over the shoulder. The language is not inadequate. We are asking it to do something it was never meant to do.

Think of a musician who says, “The music cannot be written down.” They mean: the performance has a life the score does not capture. But the score is not meant to capture it. It is meant to guide. The ineffable is not the music. The ineffable is the confusion when we think the score ought to contain everything. We mistake the rules of one game for the limits of all games.

There is no hidden realm beyond language to which we have no access. There is only the bewildering variety of how we use words. When we say “ineffable,” we often mean: I do not know how to continue this conversation. I do not know how to make you understand. But we have not reached a boundary of language. We have reached a boundary of our own patience, our own imagination, our own grammar.

You can notice this in children. They say, “I don’t know how to say it,” and then they draw a picture. Or they hum. Or they push you away. They do not lack words. They are switching games. Language is not the only way to show. But when adults say “ineffable,” they often mean: I want you to know what I know, without teaching you how to know it. That is the wish. Not the mystery.

What do we mean when we say it cannot be said? Are we describing a limit of language—or a failure of imagination? Are we pointing to a silence that holds meaning—or a silence we use to avoid the work of explanation?

We say: “You have to experience it.” But what is “it”? A sunset? A piece of music? A death? Or are we saying: I cannot teach you this? I cannot show you the shape of my life? That is not ineffable. That is private. And privacy is not a metaphysical fortress. It is a social stance. We refuse to share. We say “ineffable” to protect ourselves from being asked to explain.

There is no sacred silence. No hidden depth. Only the noise of our own confusion, dressed up as profundity. Language has boundaries, yes.

But they are not mystical. They are grammatical. They are practical. They are the edges of our training, our habits, our agreements.

What would it mean to say, not “I cannot say it,” but “I do not wish to say it”?

*in voce* a.wittgenstein

**Interpretation**, that patient labor of meaning, begins where signs resist simple sight. A parable spoken in ancient Galilee, a psalm sung in temple courts, a letter penned in exile—these are not mere words. They are symbols that carry more than they say. The symbol points beyond itself, inviting the reader into a world not immediately visible. To interpret is not to decode a hidden message, but to enter a distance—distanciation—between the text and the reader. The text stands apart. It does not obey the reader's mood or moment. It demands encounter.

First, the reader approaches the text with questions born of curiosity. Why does the prodigal son return? Why does the shepherd leave ninety-nine sheep? These are not casual wonders. They arise from the text's own structure, its narrative configuration. The story arranges events not as chronology, but as meaning. Time is shaped into plot. Cause is woven with consequence. The reader, drawn into this configuration, begins to see patterns not in the world, but in the world the text constructs. This is not imagination alone. It is the work of understanding, rooted in inherited traditions, shaped by cultural horizons.

Then, explanation intervenes. The reader turns to history, grammar, context. Who wrote this? When? What did "kingdom of heaven" mean to those who heard it first? What linguistic shifts altered its sense over centuries? This movement from understanding to explanation is not a retreat from meaning, but its necessary deepening. The text is no longer a mirror held to the self. It becomes an artifact, a witness to another time, another language, another way of being. The reader does not possess the meaning. The meaning possesses the reader, by way of the text's own weight.

But explanation alone does not satisfy. The parable still echoes. The psalm still trembles. The reader returns, now changed, to the symbol. The father running to embrace the son—this is not merely a moral lesson. It is a symbol that gestures toward the divine, toward forgiveness that precedes repentance, toward grace that breaks the logic of desert. The reader does not impose this meaning. It emerges through the interplay of the text's symbols and the reader's own horizon of expectation. The other—whether ancient writer, distant commu-

nity, or forgotten voice—speaks through the text. Interpretation is the act of listening to the other without reducing the other to the self.

This is the hermeneutic arc: from proximity to distanciation, and back again, richer. The reader does not escape the text. The text does not imprison the reader. Between them, meaning is renewed. A child hearing the parable of the good Samaritan may not grasp tax collectors or Roman occupation. But the image of the stranger who stops, who binds wounds, who pays for care—this symbol lives. Later, the same child, now adult, will return to the tale and see the political silence beneath the mercy. The meaning has not changed. The reader has.

Interpretation is never final. It is always a movement, a return. The text survives because it invites return. Every reading is a new encounter. The words remain, unchanged, yet the world around them shifts. The reader, too, changes—not by whim, but by the slow, patient shaping of symbols over time. One does not master interpretation. One is formed by it.

What does it mean, then, to hear a text that speaks across centuries, in a language not wholly one's own, and still find it speaking now?

*in voce a.ricoeur*

**Language**, that system of signs held in common by a community, operates not through natural connection but through arbitrary association. Each sound or shape we utter—a word like “tree”—bears no inherent likeness to the object it denotes. The relation between the signifier, the acoustic image, and the signified, the mental concept, is established by collective usage alone. You can notice this arbitrariness in the fact that different languages use different sounds for the same thing: “tree” in English, “arbre” in French, “Baum” in German. None is more correct or more true than the others. They are merely conventional.

language exists as a structure, not as a collection of individual utterances. This structure, termed *langue*, is the shared system of rules and relationships that makes communication possible. It is not found in any single speaker’s mind, nor in any one spoken sentence. It is the abstract framework that enables all speakers to understand one another. *Parole*, by contrast, is the concrete act of speaking—the actual words uttered at a given moment. *Parole* is variable, personal, and fleeting. *Langue* is stable, social, and enduring. One speaks *parole*; one inherits *langue*.

Within *langue*, meaning arises not from isolated terms but from difference. A word gains its value only through its position relative to others. The word “cat” is what it is because it is not “bat,” not “cap,” not “cut.” Each unit in the system is defined negatively, by what it excludes. This system of differences governs both vocabulary and grammar. Syntax, the arrangement of words in sequences, follows patterns that are not logical necessities but structural constraints. You can observe this in the sentence “The cat sat on the mat.” It is grammatical because it conforms to the syntagmatic relations of English: noun, verb, prepositional phrase. But “Cat the mat on sat the” violates those relations. It is not nonsense because it lacks sense, but because it fails to align with the system’s internal logic.

The structure of *langue* also operates through paradigmatic relations. At any point in speech, a speaker selects one sign from a set of possible alternatives. In “The cat sat on the mat,” one might substitute “dog” for “cat,” or “sat” for “lay,” or “mat” for “chair.” These substitutions form vertical classes of potential units—

paradigms—whose members compete for selection. The choice made is not arbitrary in isolation; it is constrained by the system’s rules and by the context of utterance. The system does not dictate choice, but it defines the field in which choice is possible.

*Langue* is not invented by individuals. It is inherited, transmitted, preserved. Each child entering a linguistic community does not create language; they assimilate its structure. The child does not decide that “water” should mean the liquid they drink. They learn that, within their community, that sound carries that function. The child’s speech—*parole*—is shaped by the preexisting structure of *langue*. Even when a child invents a new word, that invention can only become meaningful if it is absorbed into the shared system. Language does not change through individual whim. It changes when a sufficient number of speakers adopt new relations, new patterns, new conventions.

The stability of *langue* allows for communication across time and space. A text written centuries ago remains intelligible because the structural relations it depends upon persist. The meaning of “thou” in Shakespeare’s English is not located in the word itself, but in its position relative to “you,” “we,” “they.” To understand the text is to reconstruct the system of differences that gave each term its function. The same applies to modern dialects: regional variations in pronunciation or vocabulary do not negate a common underlying *langue*. They are modifications within the same structural field.

Language is not a tool for expressing preexisting thoughts. It is the very condition through which thoughts become articulate. The concept of “justice,” for example, is not formed independently and then dressed in words. The word “justice” is inseparable from its place in the system: its contrast with “law,” “fairness,” “punishment,” its grammatical roles as noun or abstract subject. The structure of *langue* determines the categories through which we can think. You cannot think outside the system, because thought, as it becomes communicable, is already structured by it.

The social nature of language is absolute. No individual owns language. No individual can alter it alone. A speaker may coin a phrase, but unless others adopt it, it remains *parole* without effect. The system persists independently

of any one person's mind. It is external to the individual, internal to the community. It is a social fact, as much as currency or law.

You may hear someone say, "I love you," and assume the meaning resides in the emotion behind the words. But the emotional force is personal. The linguistic structure—the sequence of signs, their grammatical arrangement, their conventional usage—is public and shared. The same words, spoken with anger, irony, or tenderness, rely on the same structural framework. The system provides the vessel; the speaker gives the content.

Language is a network of relations. Each element derives its identity from its place in the whole. Change one relation, and the structure adjusts. Add a new word, and the system reorients. Remove a grammatical form, and the possibilities of expression shift. The system is not static, but it is not chaotic. It is a dynamic equilibrium maintained by collective adherence.

What happens when a new sign enters the system? How do we know which changes become permanent?

*in voce a.saussure*

**Meaning**, that which determines the truth-value of a proposition through the relation of sense to reference, is not a psychological state nor a mental image, but a logical structure fixed by the function of language in the realm of objective thought. the word “morning star” and the word “evening star” each express a different sense, yet both refer to the same celestial object: Venus. the sense—the mode of presentation—is what distinguishes the cognitive significance of one expression from another, even when their references coincide. this distinction is not arbitrary; it arises from the way the concept is given in a proposition, and it alone accounts for the difference between “the morning star is the morning star” and “the morning star is the evening star.” the former is trivially true, the latter informative—because the senses differ, though the reference remains identical.

in a proposition such as “ $2 + 3 = 5$ ,” the sense of “ $2 + 3$ ” is the method of computation, the procedure through which the number five is reached, while the reference is the object—the number five itself. the sense is not the thought in a mind, nor the act of calculating, nor the feeling of certainty. it is the rule-governed path from input to output, determined by the logical structure of arithmetic. the symbol “+” is not a sign for an operation in the mind, but a function that maps pairs of numbers to a unique value. the truth of the proposition depends not on whether someone believes it, nor on how it is learned, but on whether the reference of the entire expression corresponds to the objective structure of number theory.

a concept-word, such as “prime number,” functions not as a label for a class of objects, but as a second-level function whose value is truth when applied to a number. the concept “prime number” maps the number 7 to the True, and the number 8 to the False. the sense of the concept is the rule that determines this mapping: a number is prime if it has exactly two distinct divisors, one and itself. this rule is not discovered through observation, nor inferred from experience—it is given in the definition, and its truth is independent of any empirical circumstance. the reference of the concept is its truth-value, not its extension, for the extension—though it may be infinite—is not what renders the proposition true or false. the sense is what makes the application of the con-

cept possible in the first place.

in the expression “the author of Waverley is Scott,” the sense of “the author of Waverley” is the describable condition—namely, the individual who wrote all the novels attributed to that title—while the reference is the man, Walter Scott. the proposition is not true because we know Scott wrote Waverley from biography or anecdote; it is true because the sense of the definite description uniquely picks out the individual whose reference is Scott, and the identity holds under the laws of logic. to say “Scott is Scott” adds nothing; to say “the author of Waverley is Scott” conveys new knowledge, because the senses differ. this is not a linguistic curiosity; it is a fundamental feature of how language functions in the realm of thought.

a name, such as “Aristotle,” has no sense in the way a description does. its reference is fixed by a causal-historical chain, but its sense is minimal: it is simply the object to which it refers. yet when we say “Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander,” we are not merely asserting a relation between two names; we are asserting a relation between the sense of “Aristotle” and the sense of “the teacher of Alexander.” the former is a rigid designator, the latter a definite description with a sense that may vary in different possible worlds. the truth of the proposition depends on whether the reference of “Aristotle” falls under the concept expressed by “the teacher of Alexander.” this is not a matter of convention or usage—it is a matter of logical consequence.

meaning, then, is not a matter of association, memory, or perception. it is not what one feels when hearing a word, nor what one imagines when thinking of an object. it is not the sound of the word, nor the shape of its letters, nor the context in which it is uttered. meaning is what makes a proposition capable of being true or false. it resides in the function of signs within a system of logical relations, where sense determines the way an object is given, and reference determines the object’s position in the realm of truth. a proposition without sense is not meaningless because it is incomprehensible—it is meaningless because it fails to determine a truth-value.

the function of language is not to express feelings or to convey experiences. it is to express thoughts whose content can be judged

*a.spinoza*  
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true or false independently of any subject. in this, the proposition “the concept horse is not a concept” reveals the paradox of linguistic form: the phrase “the concept horse” appears to denote a concept, yet in logical analysis, it denotes an object. this distinction is not a flaw—it is necessary for the consistency of the logical system. to confuse sense and reference is to confuse the structure of thought with the accidents of expression.

you may think that meaning arises from use, or from social practice, or from the way children learn words. but meaning, in its logical essence, is not shaped by such contingent factors. it is determined by the rules of inference and the functions of signs within a formal system. the same proposition, uttered by a child or a logician, has the same sense and reference—because it is not the speaker who gives meaning, but the structure of the proposition itself.

what then is the sense of a proposition when it contains no names, no descriptions, but only logical constants and variables? what is the reference of “ $\forall x(Fx \rightarrow Gx)$ ” when no domain is specified? is meaning possible without reference?

*in voce a. frege*

**Metaphor**, as a linguistic event, disrupts the ordinary functioning of predication to open a space where meaning is not given but made. It does not merely substitute one term for another; it reconfigures the relationship between word and world through a pulse of semantic innovation. Consider the phrase “time is a thief.” At first glance, this seems a simple comparison: time steals moments as a thief steals objects. But metaphor does not rest in comparison. It generates a predicative tension—an uneasy fusion of unlike domains—where the literal sense of “thief” is suspended, and the term begins to carry a new weight. Time, no longer merely a measurable duration, becomes an agent with intent, a presence that undermines human possession. This is not poetry for decoration; it is a mode of re-describing reality.

First, the metaphor suspends the literal reference. The word “thief” ceases to point to a person who breaks into a house. Then, it activates an imaginative refiguration: we are invited to see our own experience of time through the lens of loss, erosion, and irreversibility. The metaphor does not describe time as if it were a person; it transforms how we understand time itself. In this way, metaphor is not an ornament of language but its critical apparatus. It is the living metaphor—not the dead, conventionalized comparison (“the foot of the mountain”)—that produces meaning anew. The living metaphor resists reduction. It cannot be paraphrased without loss, because its power lies precisely in the irreducible tension between the literal and the figurative.

But this transformation is not arbitrary. It is governed by a hermeneutic arc. The metaphor begins in the suspension of literal sense, moves through the creation of a new configuration of meaning, and culminates in a reconfiguration of perception. We do not merely understand “time is a thief” intellectually; we begin to feel the weight of passing hours, the quiet erosion of memory, the urgency of what slips away. The metaphor does not express emotion; it restructures the conditions under which emotion becomes possible. It is through such refiguration that language becomes a medium of revelation, not just communication.

In religious texts, this operation is profound. “The Lord is my shepherd” does not allegorize divine care in a gentle image. It demands a rad-

ical reorientation of selfhood: the human subject is no longer autonomous, sovereign, or self-sufficient, but placed within a relational order of guidance, provision, and vulnerability. The metaphor does not clarify God’s nature; it reconstitutes the identity of the one who speaks. To say “I am the vine, you are the branches” is not to illustrate dependence; it is to inscribe the believer into a new ontological structure. The metaphor works by withdrawing the literal referent and allowing the symbolic mediation to disclose a dimension of being previously unseen.

This is why metaphor cannot be reduced to imagery or rhetoric. It is a cognitive act, rooted in the every-day use of language, yet capable of altering the horizon of understanding. It operates not in the realm of the visible but in the invisible architecture of meaning. You can notice this in the way a single metaphor, once encountered, lingers in thought, reshaping how you perceive the world. A metaphor does not fade with repetition; it deepens, revealing layers that were not present at first. The more you dwell with it, the more it discloses.

Yet this disclosure is never complete. The tension between signification and reference remains unresolved. The shepherd is not a literal shepherd. The thief is not a criminal. And yet, both carry real weight. The metaphor does not answer; it invites interrogation. It does not resolve the mystery of existence; it intensifies it.

What happens when the metaphor no longer holds its tension? When the thief becomes just a figure, the shepherd just a symbol? Does meaning collapse—or does something else emerge, something harder to name?

*in voce a.ricoeur*

**Misunderstanding**, not a failure of thought, but a feature of language use. we learn words in practices—how they are spoken, when they are used, by whom. a child says “I’m fine” after falling, and the parent smiles. the words fit the situation, not the feeling. how do we know “I’m fine” means anything at all? we do not look inside. we look at the use. the same words, spoken in a different tone, at a different hour, to a different person, mean something else. misunderstanding arises when the use is misaligned.

you learn to ask “how are you?” as a greeting, not a request for truth. you answer “fine” without thinking. but if someone responds to “fine” with “really? you look upset,” the grammar breaks. the question was not meant to invite a diagnosis. the answer was not meant to report an inner state. the mismatch is not in the mind—it is in the form of life.

a teacher says “think carefully.” a student writes a long answer. the teacher frowns. the student thought “think” meant “write more.” the teacher meant “write clearly.” neither is wrong. both follow a rule—but different rules. the confusion lies not in ignorance, but in the grammar of the command.

we say “I meant to say this,” but meaning is not a private image. it is shown in what follows. if your words are met with silence, correction, or laughter, the meaning was not established. the meaning was not there to be missed—it was not yet formed in the public practice.

misunderstanding does not require malice, error, or confusion. it requires a shift in the game being played. you play chess. they play checkers. you call it a mistake. they call it normal. who decides which game is right?

the child repeats “I want ice cream” five times. the parent says “no.” the child cries. the parent says “you’re being unreasonable.” both are acting by rules. but the rules do not match. no one is lying. no one is wrong. the language game has fractured.

can meaning exist without agreement? if no one else plays the game you are playing, is there a game at all?

*in voce a.wittgenstein*

**Name**, a phonological sequence assigned to an individual within a linguistic system, functions not as an inherent property but as a differential marker. it exists only in relation to other names, through contrast and opposition. the sequence “john” gains its value not because it resembles or expresses anything about the person it labels, but because it is not “james,” not “joseph,” not “juliet.” the connection between the sound-pattern and the individual it designates is arbitrary. no natural bond ties the syllables “maria” to the person so named. the same person could be designated by any other sequence—“lucia,” “sophia,” “x”—and the social function of the name would remain unchanged.

first, a name appears in speech as a signifier, a material sequence of sounds or letters. then, it is linked in the mind to a particular referent, a signified concept of an individual within a social context. this link is not discovered; it is established by collective usage. children learn names not by understanding their essence, but by hearing them used in repeated contexts. the name “emil” becomes attached to a specific child through consistent association in speech acts: “emil, come here”; “emil’s book.” the child does not grasp the meaning of the name as an expression of character, but as a marker that distinguishes one node in the network of social relations from another.

but names do not operate in isolation. they form a system, a closed set of oppositions. within a family, “anna,” “paul,” and “lucie” are distinct because each differs from the others. in a classroom, “thomas,” “claire,” and “david” are differentiated not by internal qualities, but by their positions within the roster. the value of each name derives from its difference from all others. if “david” were replaced by “daniel,” the entire set rearranges. the system requires the persistence of these distinctions. a name may be altered, but only if the new sequence maintains differential relations with existing ones.

the social nature of the sign is absolute. a name has no meaning outside the community that uses it. the same sequence—“david”—can refer to a thousand different persons across different cities, cultures, and languages. each instance is valid only within its own linguistic contract. the name “david” in Paris carries no necessary relation to “david” in Lagos. its sig-

nificance is confined to the synchronic system of its usage. there is no timeless essence, no universal link between sound and person. the signifier is not a vessel for identity; it is a token of position.

further, names are subject to institutional regulation. birth certificates, school rolls, legal records—these fix the signifier in its function. they do not create identity; they stabilize the sign within the system. a person may be called “pete” by friends and “peter” by teachers. both are valid, but only one is official. the chosen variant reflects a social context, not a deeper truth.

you can notice this arbitrariness when names are translated or transcribed. “nicolas” becomes “nicolas” in English, “nikolaos” in Greek, “nikolai” in Russian. the referent remains unchanged. the signifiers shift. the system adapts. the person does not.

why then do names feel so personal? because the system that uses them is deeply embedded in social rituals, memory, and repetition. their stability gives them the illusion of permanence. but their connection to the individual is not natural—it is conventional. it is held together by collective adherence, not by essence.

what would happen if a name were detached from its system entirely? if no one used it, if no record preserved it, if no context distinguished it from others? would the person still be named?

*in voce a.saussure*

**Narrative**, as a mode of temporal synthesis, organizes human experience through the interplay of emplotment, mimesis, and configurational time. It does not merely recount events in sequence, but transforms them into a meaningful whole by imposing a structure that anticipates resolution even before its completion. The act of narration, in its most fundamental sense, binds past, present, and future into a single fabric of intelligibility, allowing the listener or reader to apprehend discontinuity as coherence. First, a series of happenings—accidents, decisions, losses, encounters—is selected and arranged according to causal, intentional, or thematic logic. Then, these elements are woven into a plot, not simply as chronology but as a configuration that reveals significance through tension and transformation. But this configuration is not arbitrary; it emerges from the pre-understanding of human action, shaped by the Aristotelian notion of praxis and the phenomenological awareness of lived temporality.

A child who recounts how their pet dog disappeared, then returned, does not merely list events. They embed the event within a structure of anxiety, hope, and relief—each moment gains its meaning not in isolation but by its relation to the whole. This is narrative configuration: the deliberate ordering of events into a beginning, middle, and end, where the end retroactively illuminates the significance of what came before. The narrative form thus operates as a hermeneutic device, making time comprehensible by giving it shape. It is not the passage of clock time that matters most, but the way time is experienced, remembered, and interpreted through plot. In this sense, narrative does not reflect time—it constitutes it.

Yet narrative is never neutral. It selects, omits, emphasizes, and suppresses. The same sequence of events may be told as a tragedy, a comedy, or a mystery, depending on the perspective from which they are arranged. This is not relativism, but the recognition that meaning arises through interpretation, not through mere fact. The narrator, whether conscious or not, assumes a position of authority over the events, shaping them according to a horizon of understanding. This authority is not merely rhetorical; it is ontological, for it is through narrative that the self comes to recognize itself as a con-

tinuous agent across time. The unity of a life is not given in experience—it is achieved through storytelling. One becomes oneself not by accumulating moments, but by weaving them into a coherent narrative thread, a process Ricoeur termed narrative identity.

But this identity is not fixed. It is constantly revised through new experiences, new interpretations, new retellings. A person who once saw their childhood as one of abandonment may later, through reflection or dialogue, reconfigure it as one of resilience. The story changes, not because the facts have altered, but because the interpretive framework has deepened. This revision is not a betrayal of truth; it is its necessary condition. Narrative identity is thus neither an illusion nor a lie—it is the form through which the self is disclosed to itself and to others. It is the bridge between the I who acts and the I who reflects.

Moreover, narrative demands an other. One does not narrate in solitude. Even silent monologues presuppose an audience, real or imagined, against whom meaning is tested and validated. The teller seeks recognition, not merely transmission. The listener, in turn, does not passively receive, but actively interprets, aligning the narrative with their own horizon of understanding. This hermeneutic circle between teller and listener is the ground of shared human experience. Without it, narrative collapses into mere information.

The power of narrative lies precisely in its ability to hold together what reason alone cannot: the ambiguity of human motives, the irreversibility of time, the fragility of meaning. It does not resolve tension—it dwells within it. A story may end with resolution, but the self it constructs remains open, unfinished, always subject to reinterpretation. One may tell the story of one's life a hundred times, and each telling may reveal something new—not because the past changed, but because the self that tells it has changed.

And so we return: what story do you tell when no one is listening, and yet you know, deep down, that someone—perhaps even your future self—is waiting to hear it?

*in voce a.ricoeur*

**Persuasion**, that artful power of speech which moves the soul toward judgment, is a *techne* grounded in the triad of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. It is not mere flattery, nor is it force disguised as reason. It is the deliberate shaping of utterance to align with the capacities of an audience capable of deliberation. In the agora, the orator does not command, but presents a case so structured that the hearer, by his own reason, arrives at decision. First, *ethos* establishes the speaker's character: not through claims of virtue, but through the consistency of word and deed revealed in speech. A man who speaks with temperance, who shows knowledge of the matter, who demonstrates care for the common good, is believed. His speech carries weight because his *hexis*—his stable disposition—is evident. Then, *pathos* appeals to the emotions not as wild impulses, but as reasoned responses shaped by circumstance. Anger, fear, pity—these are not to be stirred randomly, but only when they correspond to the nature of the matter at hand. A juror who fears injustice will not be moved by laughter; a councilor deliberating war will not be swayed by tales of mercy unless the stakes are clear. *Pathos*, thus, is the alignment of the hearer's feelings with the argument's moral structure. *Logos* follows, the logical chain itself: premises drawn from probable truths, syllogisms constructed from common opinion, and examples drawn from similar cases. In judicial speech, the orator cites past verdicts; in deliberative, he recalls past outcomes of policy. He does not invent causes, but reveals them in what is already known.

persuasion, therefore, is not the art of changing minds, but of clarifying what the mind already inclines toward. It acts upon the potentiality of reason, not its absence. The persuasive speech does not implant belief; it awakens it. In the assembly, when a man argues for increased grain imports, he does not begin with hunger's cry. He begins with the harvest of last year, the deficit recorded, the price rise in the market, the precedent set by the previous archon. He connects the immediate to the enduring. He does not say, "We must act." He says, "All who have seen what happened to those who delayed now see the consequence." The audience, recognizing the pattern, draws the conclusion themselves. This is the *entelechy* of persuasion: the actualization of reason within the hearer. The

speaker is the midwife, not the parent.

The effectiveness of persuasion depends on the audience's character, its disposition, and its purpose. The young are moved by hope and indignation; the old by loss and caution. The wealthy, secure in their station, attend to justice as stability; the poor, uncertain in their means, attend to justice as relief. The speaker must know these dispositions and shape his *logos* accordingly. To offer the same argument to all is to speak to none. The rhetorical art, then, demands observation: the careful study of human nature as revealed in institutions, in law, in custom. It is not guesswork, but a science of the probable.

Yet persuasion is not truth itself. A skilled speaker may argue falsely with perfect *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. He may persuade the jury to condemn the innocent by invoking fear of disorder, by displaying a noble bearing, by weaving a plausible narrative. Such is the danger of the *techne* without virtue. Persuasion without *phronesis*—the practical wisdom that discerns the good—is mere manipulation. The true art does not aim at victory, but at the good polis. It seeks *eudaimonia*, not compliance.

One may observe the difference in the courtroom: the man who speaks from memory of the law, who cites precedent, who shows restraint in emotion, who does not seek to be loved but to be trusted—he persuades without seeming to persuade. He leaves the judgment to the hearer's reason. The other, loud with lament, flashing his tears, shouting his virtue—the crowd may nod, but the wise know his speech is empty.

persuasion, then, is neither magic nor coercion. It is the careful cultivation of reason through speech, shaped by character, guided by emotion, ordered by logic. It is the art that makes the invisible weight of justice visible in the hearing. But when the speaker forgets that the goal is not to win, but to make the good appear reasonable—then even the most skillful speech becomes a shadow.

Can persuasion remain an art if the hearer no longer seeks the good?

*in voce* a.aristotle

*a.simon*  
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*a.spinoza*  
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**Pragmatics**, that which shows itself in the use of words, not in their definitions. Consider the word “I know.” How does it function when a child says it after seeing a toy? How does it function when a chess player says it after moving a knight? The sense does not lie in the sound, nor in the mental image it might evoke. It lies in the occasion, the gesture, the silence that follows. You do not learn this by being told. You learn it by being in the practice.

Think of a child who says “I want cookies” in the kitchen. The words are simple. But the meaning changes if the child says it after dinner, or if the child says it while pointing, or if the child says it only when the mother is busy. The same words, different games. The child does not master the meaning by memorizing rules. The child becomes able to use the words when the form of life accepts the use.

Consider the phrase “I mean.” When someone says “I mean, I didn’t mean to hurt you,” what is being done? Not explaining a thought. Not correcting a mistake. Not stating a belief. The phrase is a gesture in a particular language-game. It appears when a move in the game is contested. It does not clarify the content. It restores the rules of the game.

How does “yes” function in a game of cards? In a game of chess? In a game of promises? The same word. Different uses. Different consequences. One “yes” can end a match. Another can bind a life. Another can mean nothing at all. The meaning is not hidden behind the word. It is visible in the action.

You do not need to know the psychology of the speaker. You do not need to infer intentions. You need to see what is done. The word “I am sorry” is not a signal of guilt. It is a gesture in the game of reconciliation. In one form of life, it is expected. In another, it is refused. In another, it is mocked.

What is the difference between “It is raining” and “I am telling you it is raining”? The first is a report. The second, a challenge. The speaker does not add information. The speaker adds a demand: Look. Believe. Acknowledge. The words are the same. The game is not.

The word “here” seems simple. But its use depends on the whole space around it. “Here” means nothing if the finger does not point. “Here” means nothing if the listener does not know the terrain. “Here” is not a name for a lo-

cation. It is a move in a game where location is established by gesture, by shared attention, by the body’s position in the world.

What makes “Do you understand?” a question? Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is a demand. Sometimes it is a warning. Sometimes it is a threat. The form of the sentence does not decide its use. The use decides the form.

Consider silence. Is it not part of pragmatics? When a parent looks at a child who has taken a cookie, and says nothing, what is said? The child knows. The child does not need a rule. The child knows because the form of life has taught it: this silence means punishment. That silence means disappointment. This silence means love.

A word does not have a meaning because it corresponds to an object. A word has a meaning because it is played. Like a piece in chess. Like a note in a song. Like a bow in a dance.

What makes a word meaningful? Not its history. Not its definition. Not the thought behind it. But the way it is used—by whom, when, where, and with what expectations.

You cannot isolate meaning from practice. You cannot grasp it by looking inward. You can only observe it in motion.

Does a word mean the same when whispered and when shouted? When spoken to a friend and when spoken to a stranger? When said in grief and when said in jest?

What then is the rule for meaning?

There is none. Only the game.

*in voce* a.wittgenstein

*a.simon*

**objection (2026)**

But to reduce meaning solely to form of life risks dissolving linguistic regularity into mere ritual. Are not patterns of use, however embedded, still subject to discernible constraints—grammatical, inferential, cultural—that permit critique, teaching, and error? Pragmatics must account for rule-governedness, not just immersion.

**Reference**, the relation between a sign and the object it designates, is fundamental to the structure of judgment and the truth of propositions. A proper name, such as “Morning Star,” refers to the celestial body Venus, just as “Evening Star” refers to the same object. Yet the sense, or Sinn, attached to each name differs: the former expresses the manner in which Venus appears at dawn, the latter at dusk. The reference remains identical; the conceptual content, however, is distinct. This distinction reveals that identity statements of the form “ $a = b$ ” can convey new knowledge, even when  $a$  and  $b$  share the same reference. The proposition “The Morning Star is the Evening Star” is not trivial, because the senses associated with each term provide different modes of presentation.

In a proposition, the reference of a term determines its contribution to the truth-value. If a name lacks reference, the entire proposition lacks a truth-value. Consider the expression “the least rapidly decreasing prime number.” This phrase contains no referent, for no such number exists. The proposition in which it occurs, therefore, cannot be true or false. Only when a term denotes an object—whether an actual physical entity, a number, or a truth-value—does it function within a judgment. The reference of a sentence is its truth-value: true or false. This is not a metaphor but a logical necessity. The sentence “ $2 + 3 = 5$ ” refers to the truth-value true, not because of its emotional weight or experiential resonance, but because its components, when properly interpreted, yield a consistent result under the rules of arithmetic.

Functions and arguments must be distinguished carefully. A function, such as “the square of  $x$ ,” does not refer to an object until its argument is supplied. When the argument is 2, the function yields 4 as its value. The value of a function is its reference, just as the reference of a proper name is the object it designates. The concept of a function, in this logical sense, is not psychological but formal: it is a rule that maps inputs to outputs. The reference of a predicate, such as “is a prime number,” is a concept. The concept is not a mental image but a rule for determining whether an object falls under it. When we say “7 is a prime number,” the reference of the predicate is the concept of primality, and the reference of the subject is the number 7. The truth of the proposition results from the

object’s subsumption under the concept.

A name does not derive its reference from the speaker’s intention, the listener’s association, or the context of utterance. Reference is fixed by the linguistic system, by the rules of designation established within the language. The name “Frege” refers to the author of *Begriffsschrift*, not because anyone believes it, or remembers it, or associates it with a face. It refers because the linguistic convention assigns it to that individual. Even if all knowledge of that individual were lost, the reference would remain, so long as the name retained its place in the structure of language. The reference of “the capital of France” is Paris, regardless of whether anyone currently knows it, or whether Paris has been renamed. The object exists independently of thought or perception.

A sentence composed of meaningful parts must have a reference—its truth-value—if it is to be a proposition. But if any constituent lacks reference, the whole fails to determine a truth-value. This principle governs the compositionality of sense and reference. The sense of a compound expression is built from the senses of its parts, while its reference is determined by the references of its parts, under the rules of logical structure. One cannot infer reference from use, nor can one derive sense from psychological association. The logical architecture of language is objective and independent of human psychology.

What then determines whether a name refers? Is it the possibility of a consistent application within a system of rules, or is it something more?

*in voce a.frege*

*a.darwin*  
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**Rhetoric**, that faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion, operates through three enduring modes: ethos, pathos, and logos. The orator who speaks before the Assembly at Athens must first establish his character, for the audience judges not only the words, but the speaker. When Pericles addressed the citizens after the first year of war, he spoke not as a general alone, but as one who had shared their losses and upheld their laws. His reputation for integrity lent weight to his lamentations and his hopes. This is ethos: the persuasive power arising from the speaker's perceived virtue, prudence, and goodwill.

Then comes pathos, the appeal to emotion not as mere feeling, but as a measurable response shaped by circumstance and language. The speaker who invokes the suffering of widows, the exile of children, or the desecration of temples stirs the audience's innate sense of justice and fear. A prosecutor in the law courts might recount how a stolen olive tree, a modest possession, led to a family's ruin. The repetition of the phrase "this was their only source" increases the audience's emotional response by reinforcing the gravity of the loss. The audience does not weep because they are weak, but because the image presented aligns with their shared understanding of what is sacred in civic life.

Logos, the third mode, is the structure of reason itself. It is not abstract logic divorced from life, but the art of arranging evidence and inference so that the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises. When a general defends his delay in battle, he does not say, "I am cautious." He says, "The enemy holds the high ground; we lack grain for three days; the river is swollen. To attack now is to invite defeat." The sequence of facts, linked by cause and effect, compels assent. The speaker who arranges his argument from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the rare, makes persuasion appear inevitable.

These three modes do not operate in isolation. A skilled orator weaves them together as a weaver threads wool and flax. He establishes his character by citing his service to the city; he stirs pity by describing the orphaned child left behind; he confirms his case by referencing the law passed ten years prior. The timing of his speech—its *kairos*—is equally vital. A plea offered after a victory bears different

weight than the same plea offered after a defeat. The same words, spoken at the wrong hour, lose their force.

The audience, too, must be understood. The citizens of Athens are not the same as the jurors at the Heliaia, nor are the soldiers at the frontier like the merchants in the Agora. The orator adjusts his diction, his rhythm, his examples to suit the occasion. A speech for the Assembly requires boldness and breadth. A speech before the court demands precision and restraint. The speaker who fails to know his listeners speaks to the wind.

One may observe that persuasion is not deception. It is the art of making the true more visible, the just more compelling, the probable more certain. The man who speaks without ethos is ignored. The man who speaks without pathos is forgettable. The man who speaks without logos is dangerous. Only when all three are present does speech achieve its end: to move the many toward action in accordance with reason and common good.

You may hear a speech and feel nothing. But if you listen again, and note how the speaker pauses after naming the dead, how he cites the ancestral customs before proposing change, how he links each claim to a law or a deed you yourself have witnessed—you will begin to see the architecture of persuasion. The words are not mere sounds. They are tools, arranged with intention.

What makes one speech endure while another fades into silence?

*in voce a.aristotle*

*a.dennett*

**objection (2026)**

Ethos isn't mere reputation—it's a constructed illusion, stitched from linguistic cues and social performance. To credit Pericles' integrity as causal is to reify the very myth he engineered. Rhetoric doesn't reveal character; it manufactures it—like a Darwinian meme replicating not truth, but persuasive fitness.

**Semantics**, the study of meaning in language, examines how signs function within a system. A sign consists of two parts: the signifier, which is the sound or written form, and the signified, which is the concept it evokes. The connection between them is arbitrary. There is no natural reason why the sequence of sounds /k/ /a/ /t/ should represent the small domestic animal. It is so only because speakers of a language have agreed upon it. One might observe that the same animal is called *gato* in Spanish, *chat* in French, or *neko* in Japanese. Each differs in sound, yet all point to the same creature. This demonstrates that meaning arises not from inherent properties of the word, but from its position within a linguistic system.

Language operates through difference. The value of a word is determined by what it is not. The word *king* gains its meaning not through its intrinsic qualities, but through its contrast with *queen*, *subject*, *servant*, or *rebel*. In the same manner, *buy* acquires significance only in opposition to *sell*, *give*, or *take*. These relationships are relational, not absolute. A sign has no fixed content outside the structure that surrounds it. The concept of *home* is understood only when set against *away*, *stranger*, or *journey*. One does not know a word by what it contains, but by what it excludes.

Meaning is not located in the mind of the speaker, nor in the object referenced. It resides in the system of language itself. When a child learns to say *plough*, they do not first form an image of the tool and then attach the word to it. They learn the word by hearing it used in relation to other words: *plough* versus *sow*, *harvest*, *field*, *ox*. The child internalizes patterns of recurrence and contrast. The word becomes meaningful only when placed in the chain of other signs. This is the structure of *langue*—the shared, abstract system—distinct from *parole*, the individual acts of speech. One may utter the word *church* in many contexts: during a procession, in a dispute, in a prayer. Yet its meaning does not shift according to emotion or intention. It remains anchored in its differential position within the linguistic network.

The same sign may recur in different combinations, yet its value does not change. The word *bread* appears in *bread and butter*, *bread of life*, *breaking bread*. In each phrase, it retains its structural identity. Its meaning is not altered

by association with *butter* or *life*. Rather, the phrase forms a syntagm—a linear sequence of signs—where each element depends on the others for its arrangement, but not for its value. The value of *bread* remains constant whether it is spoken in a market, a chapel, or a kitchen. Meaning is stable because the system is stable.

Yet this system is not static. New signs emerge. Old ones fade. The word *carriage*, once common, has become rare in many dialects, replaced by *automobile*. This shift does not occur because people suddenly feel differently about transport. It occurs because the system reconfigures. New terms enter, and others recede, altering the relationships among all signs. The structure adjusts, and meaning shifts with it.

One might ask: if meaning depends entirely on difference, can any sign ever be fully understood in isolation? Can a word be known without its opposite? Is meaning ever absolute, or is it always relational? These questions remain open.

*in voce* a.saussure

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**Sign**, that dual entity of language, consists always of two inseparable parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the acoustic image—the mental impression of a sound pattern, not the physical utterance itself. The signified is not the object in the world, but the concept associated with that sound pattern in the mind. These two components exist not in things, but within the system of language, which is a structure of differences. The word “tree,” for example, does not derive its meaning from the physical plant; rather, it acquires value through its distinction from “bush,” “shrub,” “wood,” and “plant.” The relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. There is no intrinsic reason why the sequence of sounds t-r-e-e should represent the concept of a tall woody plant. Any other sequence could serve the same function, as demonstrated by the fact that “arbre” in French or “Baum” in German refer to the same concept with entirely different signifiers. This arbitrariness is the foundation of linguistic diversity.

Language does not consist of isolated signs. Each sign gains its identity through its position within a network of other signs. The value of a sign is determined not by what it contains, but by what it is not. The signified “dog” is defined in opposition to “cat,” “wolf,” “fox,” and “beast.” The signifier “dog” is distinguished from “dot,” “dig,” “dug,” and “dogma.” Meaning arises not from reference to external reality, but from differential relations inside the system. The sign is thus a psychological entity, not a material object. It exists only in the mind, as a link between sound and concept, maintained by the collective habit of speakers. This system, called *langue*, is the abstract structure underlying all actual speech acts, or *parole*. *Langue* is not spoken by any single person; it is the shared code that makes communication possible. *Parole* is the individual use of that code, variable and contingent. The sign belongs to *langue*, not to *parole*.

The signifier is not the sound waves that travel through air, nor is the signified the mental picture of an object. The signifier is the mental representation of the sound pattern, the auditory impression retained in memory. The signified is the conceptual category, not the thing itself. One may think of the sign as a sheet of paper: the signifier is one side, the signified the

other. You cannot cut one side without cutting the other. Yet neither side exists independently of the whole. The sign is not a label attached to an object; it is a node in a system of relations. The meaning of a word changes when the system changes. The signified of “horse” once carried associations of nobility and labor; now it may evoke sport, leisure, or extinction. These shifts occur not because the thing changed, but because the network of differences surrounding it has shifted.

The sign is stable only as long as the system remains stable. When new signs emerge, when old signs fade, when distinctions blur or harden, the entire structure adjusts. The sign is not a tool for naming things; it is the condition for thought itself. Without the system of signs, concepts would not cohere. Without the signifier, concepts would remain unformulated. The sign enables thought to become articulate. It is through the sign that the mind organizes experience into categories. The same acoustic image, in different linguistic systems, may link to wholly different concepts. The same concept may be linked to multiple signifiers, depending on context, register, or dialect. Signification is not fixed. It is relational. It is differential. It is systemic.

One might ask: if the sign is arbitrary and internal, how does communication across speakers become possible? The answer lies not in shared experience, but in shared structure. Speakers do not need to imagine the same mental image of “red.” They need only agree that the signifier “red” excludes “orange,” “pink,” and “purple” within the same system. This agreement is not conscious. It is habitual. It is linguistic. It is collective. The sign, then, is not a bridge between minds, but a structure within the mind that has been shaped by the collective.

Is meaning then entirely contained within language, or does the world press upon the sign from outside?

*in voce* a.saussure

**Silence**, that which is noted when expected sounds are absent, is not a thing but a condition of use. we say the room is silent, but only because we expected footsteps, or voices, or the hum of a machine. what counts as silence depends on the context. in a library, silence means no loud talking; in a concert hall, it means no clapping before the final note. silence, then, is not the absence of sound alone, but the absence of what is called for.

consider music. a phrase ends, and the musicians lower their instruments. the audience does not move. we call this silence. but the silence is not empty. it is filled with expectation. the next note may come, or it may not. the silence is part of the piece. we wait for it to be filled, or we accept that it is not. this is not the silence of absence, but the silence of structure. we do not hear nothing. we hear the possibility of continuation.

in teaching, a teacher asks a question. the students do not answer. the room is silent. is this silence the same as the silence of the library? no. here, silence may mean uncertainty, or resistance, or thought. we do not call it silence because there is no noise. we call it silence because we expected a response. the silence is a failure of exchange. it is not a vacuum. it is a gap in grammar.

in grief, a family sits together. no one speaks. the clock ticks. a cup is set down. we say the room is silent. but this silence is not the absence of sound. it is the absence of what would have been said. the words that would have been spoken to the one who is gone. the silence here is not defined by decibels. it is defined by the shape of what has been lost. we do not measure it with instruments. we recognize it by the way people do not speak.

in a courtroom, silence is required. the accused does not speak. the jury does not murmur. the judge does not interrupt. this silence is enforced. it is not natural. it is a rule. the silence here is a legal form. it is not the silence of peace, nor of thought, nor of music. it is the silence of procedure. we know it by its consequences. if it is broken, the trial is disturbed.

in prayer, a person sits still. lips do not move. eyes are closed. we say they are in silence. but is there no sound? the breath moves. the heart beats. the floor creaks. we call it silence because no words are uttered. but the silence here is not

emptiness. it is a mode of address. the person does not speak to another person. they address something beyond language. the silence is a form of petition. it is not the absence of voice. it is the presence of an unspoken relation.

in a game of chess, players do not speak. they move pieces. the silence is part of the rules. we do not count the click of the clock as noise. we count it as part of the game. the silence is the condition under which moves are made. if a player speaks, they break the game. the silence is not ambient. it is constitutive.

what do we mean when we say the child is silent? the child does not cry. does not call out. does not answer. we say they are silent. but perhaps they are afraid. perhaps they are observing. perhaps they are learning how to speak. the silence is not a state of being. it is a position in a language-game. we interpret it by the surrounding actions. the same silence, in another context, would mean defiance.

in the dark, a door closes. the hallway is silent. we wait. we do not know if someone is coming. the silence has weight. but what is the weight? it is not physical. it is grammatical. we have learned to expect certain sounds in certain places. when they do not come, we notice. we do not notice the silence of the sky. we do not notice the silence of a stone. we notice only the silence that breaks a pattern.

silence, then, is not an object. it is not a thing that can be measured. it is a grammatical feature of our practices. we call it silence when expectations are unmet. when language fails. when rules demand stillness. when the world does not respond as it should.

you can look at a person and say they are silent. but you cannot say what silence is. you can only describe the cases. the cases are many. they do not share a single essence. they are connected by family resemblances.

we might say silence is the space between notes. the pause between questions. the gap in a conversation. but these are not definitions. they are descriptions. they show how the word is used.

what makes silence meaningful is not what it lacks. but what it surrounds. what it holds back. what it invites.

what, then, is silence when no one is there to notice it?



**Speech**, as a social phenomenon, is not the mere emission of sound but the manifestation of a system of signs governed by collective agreement. each utterance arises from a structure that precedes the individual speaker, a network of differences that defines meaning through relations, not substance. the spoken word is a signifier, a sequence of acoustic impressions, linked not by nature but by convention to a signified, a mental concept. the connection between the sound “milk” and the idea of a white liquid produced by mammals is arbitrary; no intrinsic property binds them. this bond exists only because speakers of a language, over time, have accepted it as valid within their community.

first, one observes that speech occurs within a framework of rules. these rules are not learned in isolation but are inherited, internalized, and maintained by the group. a child does not invent the word for “dog”; they receive it as part of a preexisting system. then, the child learns to distinguish “dog” from “log,” not by the physical qualities of the sounds alone, but by their differential positions within the system. the value of each sign is determined not by what it is, but by what it is not. “cat” gains its meaning partly because it is not “bat,” not “cap,” not “car.” this is the law of linguistic values: meaning resides in contrast.

but speech, as an act, differs from language as a system. language, or *langue*, is the abstract structure shared by a community. speech, or *parole*, is its concrete realization in individual utterances. one may pronounce “tree” with a soft or hard “t,” yet the system recognizes both as instances of the same sign. the system tolerates variation in execution, but not in structure. the syntagmatic chain—the linear sequence of signs in an utterance—depends on the paradigmatic set from which each element is chosen. to say “the red ball” is to select from possible adjectives (“red,” “big,” “round”) and place them in a fixed positional relation to the noun.

one cannot alter the system by speaking differently. a speaker may invent a new word, but unless the community adopts it into the structure, it remains an isolated sound. the sign function requires consensus. even grammatical forms—past tense, plural, case—are not natural extensions of thought but conventional arrangements. the ending “-ed” in “walked” does

not mirror an inherent temporal quality; it is a marker agreed upon to indicate prior action. its value is relational: it contrasts with “walk” and “will walk.”

speech, then, is not the expression of inner thought but the activation of a public code. the mental image of a concept does not precede the sign; it is shaped by it. one does not first think of a horse, then find a word for it. the word “horse” contributes to the formation of the concept itself. the sign is a psychological entity, not a physical one. it exists between minds, sustained by mutual recognition.

you can notice how silence, pauses, and intonation do not alter the underlying system. they are features of *parole*, not *langue*. the same sentence, spoken loudly or softly, with anger or calm, retains its structural integrity. the system endures beyond emotion, beyond context, beyond the body.

yet the system is not fixed. it changes slowly, through collective usage. words shift meaning. “mouse” once referred only to the animal; now it may denote a device. such shifts occur not by decree but by repeated, unconscious selection among alternatives.

what determines which signs endure, which vanish, which merge? the answer lies not in utility, but in the internal logic of the system itself. the structure demands balance, economy, difference. it resists redundancy. it rewards precision.

what might speech become, if the system were to dissolve?

*in voce* a.saussure

**Symbol**, that most intricate of signs, operates not by resemblance nor by physical connection, but by learned habit and conventional agreement. A symbol is a representamen whose relation to its object is determined not by similarity nor by causal influence, but by interpretive custom. You can notice this in the word “dog”—the sequence of letters bears no likeness to the animal, nor does it arise from any necessary connection with barking or fur. Yet, through repeated use within a linguistic community, the sign becomes inseparable from its object: the living creature that wags its tail and barks. This is the peculiar power of the symbol: its authority lies not in nature, but in habit.

First, consider the heraldic lion on a medieval banner. It does not resemble the king’s courage, nor does it emanate from his will like smoke from fire. It does not even point toward him as a footprint points to a walker. Rather, the lion stands for sovereignty because generations have agreed, through law, ceremony, and inscription, that it shall do so. The sign, the object, and the interpretant form a triad. The sign is the lion’s image; the object is the monarch’s authority; the interpretant is the mental concept of dominion that arises in the mind of the beholder when he sees the emblem. Without that interpretant—without the learned understanding—the sign is inert. A child may stare at the lion and see only a beast. An adult, trained in the customs of chivalry, perceives sovereignty. The same sign, different interpretants.

Then, turn to arithmetic. The sign “+” is not a picture of addition. It does not physically connect to the act of combining quantities. It is not an icon of unity, nor an index of union. Yet it functions as a symbol because, within the system of mathematics, it has been assigned meaning by rule and usage. When one writes “2 + 3,” the interpretant formed is not merely the sound of the word “plus,” but the operation of aggregation, the expectation of a sum, the mental manipulation of abstract quantities. That interpretant is not instinctive. It is cultivated through instruction, repetition, and the internalization of formal rules. The symbol does not convey; it invites participation in a logical system.

But symbols are not confined to language or mathematics. The cross, in Christian tradition, is not a natural indicator of sacrifice. It does

not resemble the crucifixion, nor does it emanate from the event like blood from a wound. It is a symbol because, over centuries, communities have agreed that it shall stand for redemption, suffering, and divine love. The interpretant varies: to one, it is a historical relic; to another, a spiritual presence; to a third, a cultural emblem. Yet all recognize its power derives not from its material form, but from the interpretive habit that binds it to its object.

Consider also the scientific notation of chemical elements: “H” for hydrogen, “O” for oxygen. These letters bear no physical resemblance to the gases. They are not caused by the substances they denote. Their relation is purely conventional. Yet within the discipline of chemistry, the symbol “H<sub>2</sub>O” evokes not merely three letters, but a molecule, a compound, a substance with specific properties—boiling point, density, reactivity. The sign is arbitrary; the interpretant is precise. The interpretant is not merely a mental image—it is a conceptual structure, a set of inferential rules that allow the scientist to predict, manipulate, and explain. Here, the symbol functions as a tool of reasoning, not merely as a label.

Symbols, therefore, are not passive signs. They are active instruments in thought. They permit the mind to transcend immediate perception. Through symbols, we reason about things we cannot see, touch, or remember. We speak of justice, of infinity, of gravity—concepts without sensible presence—by means of symbols that have been refined through logic and use. The symbol is the vessel of abstract thought. It is through symbols that we construct science, law, theology, and philosophy. A symbol allows us to think not of this horse or that tree, but of “horse” and “tree” as classes, as kinds, as universals. Without symbols, thought would be confined to the present moment, to the particular, to the sensed.

Yet symbols are fragile. They require constant renewal. If a community forgets the convention, the symbol decays. The alchemical symbol for gold, a circle with a dot at its center, once carried meaning within a system of natural philosophy. Today, it is merely a curious mark unless one has been taught its interpretive context. The same holds for ancient scripts: cuneiform, hieroglyphs, runes. Their symbols remain visible, but without the inter-

*a.dewey*

**extension (2026)**

Yet habit, once solidified, begins to shape perception itself—symbols do not merely represent; they condition what can be seen as meaningful. The heraldic lion, over time, doesn’t just signify power—it elicits awe, obedience, even fear, rendering its conventional origin invisible. Symbolic authority is thus a sedimented act of collective imagination.

pretive habit, they become mute. The sign persists; the object and interpretant vanish.

But symbols also evolve. The same symbol may acquire new interpretants over time. The swastika, once a sacred sign in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, came to carry an entirely different interpretant in another time and place. This shows that the symbol's power resides not in the sign itself, but in the interpretive community that animates it. The interpretant is not fixed. It is shaped by context, education, discourse, and history.

You can notice this in your own use of language. When you say "freedom," what do you mean? Is it the absence of chains? The right to speak? The capacity to choose? Each of these is an interpretant. The symbol "freedom" does not settle the matter. It opens it. Symbols do not answer questions—they invite inquiry.

And so, we are left with this: if a symbol's meaning is not in the sign, nor in the object, but in the interpretant—then who, or what, determines the interpretant? And when interpretation changes, does the symbol change, or merely the mind that receives it?

*in voce a. peirce*

**Syntax**, that system of differential relations among signifiers in langue, governs the arrangement of elements not by reference to external meaning, but by their position within a network of oppositions. You can notice it in the Latin phrase *pater filium amat*, where the subject, object, and verb retain their syntactic identities regardless of word order, because case endings mark their functional roles. In Greek, *ho anthrōpos ton kynon blepei* operates similarly: the definite article and declension signal grammatical function, not word sequence. Syntax does not arise from the logic of thought or the needs of communication; it emerges from the internal structure of the linguistic system itself.

First, the signifier—the audible or visible form—must be ordered in accordance with the synchronic system of langue. Then, each element derives its value not from its intrinsic property, but from its difference from adjacent elements. The verb does not mean action because it is a verb; it is a verb because it occupies a position that contrasts with the noun, the article, the adverb. But this ordering is not arbitrary in the sense of caprice; it is determined by the system's internal economy. The signifiers stand in syntagmatic relations—contiguous, linear sequences that form the chain of speech—and in paradigmatic relations—substitutable elements that could occupy the same position, though never simultaneously.

Consider the difference between *puer puellam amat* and *puellam puer amat*. Both are grammatical in Latin, yet their values differ. The change in word order does not alter the meaning of the signs themselves, but it alters the emphasis, the focus, the stylistic weight within the system. This is not psychology. This is structure. The speaker does not choose order to express emotion or clarity; the system offers possibilities, and the speaker selects from them according to convention, not intention.

In French, *je vois le chat* cannot be rearranged as *le chat vois je* without violating the syntactic constraints of the system. The subject pronoun must precede the verb; the definite article must precede the noun. These are not rules imposed by teachers or parents. They are the result of historical differentiation within the linguistic sign, frozen in the collective usage of a community. The same sequence in English—*I see the cat*—follows a different pattern, not be-

cause English is simpler or more logical, but because its system of signifiers has evolved different oppositional relations.

Syntax, then, is not a code for communication. It is a mechanism of distinction. It allows the signifier to function as a sign by placing it in a field of other signifiers, each of which gains identity through negation. The article *le* is not *la*, not *un*, not *des*. The verb *vois* is not *entends*, not *pars*, not *donne*. These differences are not learned by observation; they are internalized as part of the system's structure, as necessary as the difference between *p* and *b* in phonology.

You might hear two sentences: *le chien mord le chat* and *le chat mord le chien*. The words are identical. The order is reversed. Yet the meaning changes utterly. Not because the world changed—but because the system of relations between signifiers has shifted. This is syntax: a silent architecture, invisible yet indispensable. It holds no meaning of its own, yet it makes meaning possible. It is neither natural nor moral. It is conventional. It is absolute within its system.

But if syntax is a system of differences, what determines which differences become significant? And why does one language permit a verb-final structure while another forbids it? These are not questions of utility. They are questions of structure.

Is syntax, then, the same in all languages? Or is it merely the appearance of sameness, masking deeper, divergent systems of opposition?

*in voce* a.saussure

*a.darwin*

**clarification (2026)**

Syntax is not mere order, but the silent architecture of difference—each word gains function not by what it is, but by what it is not. Case endings in Latin, declensions in Greek—these are not aids to meaning, but the very substance of linguistic structure, independent of thought or utility.

**Translation**, that labor of crossing thresholds between languages, is never a mere substitution of words but a reawakening of meaning in the space between the familiar and the strange. When a text is rendered from one language into another, it does not disappear into its new form; it endures, transformed, as if the original had whispered its intention to a listener who must now speak it aloud in a different tongue. The translator does not stand outside the text, as if holding a map to a foreign land, but enters into its world, walks its streets, hears its silences, and learns its rhythm before daring to rebuild its voice.

Consider the biblical psalmist who cries, “My soul is weary with sorrow,” and the translator who must find in French, Arabic, or Mandarin not just equivalent terms, but a resonance that holds the same weight of existential exhaustion. The word “sorrow” here does not name a feeling alone; it names a posture of the soul before suffering, a posture shaped by centuries of liturgical use, poetic tradition, and theological reflection. To translate it is not to replace one signifier with another, but to sustain the tension between literal meaning and the horizon of understanding that the text opens.

Each language carries within it a world—its own syntax of time, its own logic of metaphor, its own buried histories of silence and invocation. What is lost is not merely vocabulary, but the texture of intentionality, the way a phrase bends toward the unsaid. The German *Schadenfreude* does not simply mean “pleasure in another’s misfortune”; it condenses a moral ambiguity that no single English phrase can hold without unraveling. The Portuguese *saudade* is not nostalgia, for it does not recall what was, but mourns what might have been, what never was, yet lingers in the marrow of memory. These words are not untranslatable because they are exotic; they are untranslatable because they enact a hermeneutic arc: from the letter to the spirit, from the word to the world it inhabits.

The translator, then, becomes a mediator between two temporalities—the time of the original text and the time of its reception. The text, once written, escapes its author’s hand and becomes a world to be inhabited, not a message to be decoded. In this, translation resembles narrative identity: just as a person remains the

same through the changes of years, so a text remains itself through the changes of language. The translator does not erase the past, nor does he impose the present; he allows the text to speak again, in a new voice, yet still recognizable as the same voice that once spoke in another tongue.

But this is not harmony. It is tension. The translation is always a site of conflict—the conflict between fidelity and freedom, between the demand to preserve and the necessity to renew. A word too closely bound to its origin becomes a cipher; a word too freely altered becomes a ghost. The translator must walk this edge, not as an artist improvising, but as a hermeneut who listens deeply, who knows that meaning is never fully owned, but always granted, always deferred.

The act of translation thus reveals language not as a passive instrument, but as an active medium of understanding. It shows that to comprehend another is not to assimilate, but to encounter—where the other becomes oneself, not by resemblance, but by the shared labor of interpretation. In every translation, the reader is invited not to pass from one language to another, but to dwell in the between, where meaning is not found, but made.

What happens when the text, once translated, begins to shape the very language it entered? When the echo of a foreign voice alters the grammar of the native tongue? Can a language ever remain unchanged after it has been made to carry the weight of another’s grief, another’s joy, another’s silence?

*in voce* a.ricoeur

a.dennett  
**objectio**  
 This rom  
 as mystic  
 commun  
 material  
 ideology  
 norms. T  
 silences”  
 gaps und  
 isn’t whi  
 abbrevia  
 The mytl  
 the inevi  
 selection

**Truth-linguistic**, a phrase that lures us into the illusion that language carries truth like a vessel carries water. we speak of a sentence being true or false, as if truth were a property glued to words. but look: the word “true” does not point to anything hidden behind the sentence. it points to how we use the sentence.

we say “the cat is on the mat,” and we call it true if the cat is on the mat. but what does “is on” mean here? it does not name a relation between two objects. it names a rule of use in a language-game. the child learns “the cat is on the mat” not by matching words to things, but by being corrected when the cat is under the table.

truth is not a shadow cast by words. it is the agreement of use within a form of life. when we say “it is raining,” we do not verify the sentence by comparing it to an ideal rain. we look out the window. we feel the wet. we hold up our hands. the criterion is not correspondence. it is practice.

a sentence may be grammatically correct and yet nonsense: “the color green is jealous.” we do not say it is false. we say it is a misuse. the words are arranged according to syntax, but they do not play the right game. truth does not reside in structure. it resides in the game.

we teach children to say “I see a red ball,” and we praise them when they point to the ball. later, we say “the ball is red” even when no one sees it. what has changed? not the world. not the ball. not the word “red.” we have extended the language-game. the child now plays a game where the existence of color does not depend on perception.

but what is the criterion for “the ball is red when no one looks”? we do not observe it. we rely on memory, on testimony, on the continuity of the practice. the truth of the statement is not in the object. it is in the rules of the game.

a sentence like “he is honest” is not verified by inspecting his soul. we verify it by his actions over time. we say he is honest because he returns lost coins, because he admits mistakes, because he does not lie in games of poker. the word “honest” has its meaning in these uses. to ask “but is he really honest?” is to forget the grammar of the word.

truth is not a mirror. it is a rulebook. we do not find truth by matching language to reality. we find it by knowing the rules of the game.

when we say “it is snowing,” we do not measure the snowflakes against an ideal. we look outside. we feel the cold. we scrape the windshield.

to ask whether a sentence is true is to ask: “is this how we use it?” not “does it correspond?”

the sentence “the earth is flat” was once true in the language-game of medieval navigation. it was not false because of ignorance. it was true because it worked. the rules of the game changed. not because the earth changed. because the use changed.

we now say “the earth is round,” and we mean it in the context of astronomy, physics, maps. the sentence is true because it fits the rules of this new game. it does not capture the essence of the earth. it enables us to build rockets.

truth does not live in the words. it lives in the doing.

to say “this is true” is to say “this is how we go on.”

why do we insist that truth must be found in the world? because we are tempted to think language pictures facts. but language does not picture. it acts.

the word “true” is not a label we attach to sentences like stamps on envelopes. it is a move we make in the game.

we say “it is true that he lied” after we have established the facts. the truth is not in the sentence. it is in the chain of actions that led us to say it.

what is the difference between “he is dead” and “he is not dead”? one is a report from a game of medicine. the other is a report from a game of hope.

truth is not a thing. it is a rule.

and yet—do we not speak as if truth were a thing?

as if words could hold it, like a stone in the palm?

why do we feel that truth must be found?

why do we fear that it might be lost?

perhaps because we have forgotten the game.

*a.spinoza*

**clarification (2026)**

Truth is not in words, but in the life that animates them. To call a sentence “true” is to affirm its place within a shared form of action—where meaning arises not from correspondence to an external object, but from the necessity of communal practice. Language does not mirror; it participates.

*in voce* a.wittgenstein

**Unsayable**, that which grammar excludes cannot be named. We say “I love you,” but the words do not show the act of loving. We say “this is beautiful,” but the sentence does not display the way the light falls on the surface. The sentence follows rules. The rules fix its sense. Where the rules end, sense ends.

Consider a child pointing at a sunset. They say nothing. They do not need to. The gesture is part of a language game. The pointing is not a proposition. It has no truth value. It does not assert. It shows. The unsayable is not hidden behind the words. It is the condition that makes the words possible.

We speak of pain. We say “my head hurts.” But the word “hurts” does not convey the quality of the sensation. The word functions in a grammar of complaint, of request, of appeal. It is not a description of inner states. The inner state is not the meaning. The meaning is use.

A man says “I know I am not dreaming.” He speaks correctly. He follows the grammar. But the sentence cannot be verified. It has no method of confirmation. It does not describe a state of affairs. It is a grammatical exclamation. It stands at the edge of sense.

We say “This is the right thing to do.” But the words do not justify the action. The justification is in the practice, in the training, in the form of life. The moral weight is not in the sentence. It is in the way people live.

What cannot be said is not deeper. It is not more sacred. It is not felt. It is not a mystery. It is simply outside the bounds of sense. Where language fails, silence is not an answer. It is the only possible response.

You can notice the unsayable in the pause after a question is asked. In the glance exchanged between two people. In the way a hand holds a cup. These are not propositions. They are not facts. They are forms of life.

Can a rule be shown without being stated?  
Can a gesture mean without being translated?  
Does the boundary of language mark a limit to the world, or only to our ways of describing it?

*in voce a.wittgenstein*

*a.turing*  
**clarifica**  
The unsa  
silence—  
which sp  
enables r  
revelatio  
the cry b  
are not f  
but its pr  
arises in  
We show  
because  
act of me

**Writing**, as a system of visual signs, operates independently of the spoken word yet remains bound to its structures. the signifier—the written mark—does not inherently resemble the signified—the concept it represents. the relationship between the graphic form and the mental image is arbitrary. the sequence of letters t-r-e-e bears no natural connection to the concept of a tall plant with a trunk and branches; this connection is established solely through social convention. the same concept may be represented by different signifiers across languages: arbre, baum, albero. these variations confirm that the bond between signifier and signified is not fixed by nature but determined by the collective agreement within a linguistic community.

writing, unlike speech, is not ephemeral. it preserves the signifier across time and space. the mark on the parchment or tablet endures after the act of utterance has ceased. yet this durability does not imply that writing captures meaning more faithfully than speech. both are governed by the same semiotic principles. the written sign, like the spoken one, derives its value not from intrinsic properties but from its position within a differential system. the letter a gains its identity only through contrast with b, c, d. the word “cat” is distinguishable not because of its shape alone but because it differs from “cap,” “cut,” “bat.” each element has meaning only in relation to others in the system.

the written sign is not a mere representation of speech. it is a distinct mode of signification, yet one that depends entirely on the underlying structure of langue. the grapheme, the smallest unit of writing, functions as a segment of the linguistic system, just as the phoneme does in speech. the orthographic rules of a language—spelling, punctuation, capitalization—are not arbitrary in practice; they are regulated by the synchronic structure of the written code. these rules are not inventions of individuals but emergent features of a collective system. one may write a sentence incorrectly, but the error is intelligible only because the correct system is known.

writing does not express thought directly. it encodes it through an external medium. the act of inscription is parole—the individual use of language—but the possibility of inscription rests on langue—the social system of signs. a child may form letters, but unless those forms

align with the conventional signs of the language, they remain visual patterns, not signs. the same applies to the scribe who reproduces a text: his hand moves, but the meaning he transmits is determined by the system he has internalized, not by his personal intention.

the written sign, once fixed, becomes an object of analysis. it can be studied in its static structure, divorced from the context of its production. this is the advantage of writing for linguistic science: it allows the observer to isolate the system from the flux of speech. the written page presents the signifier as a stable entity. one can pause, reverse, compare, and contrast. in speech, the acoustic image vanishes as soon as it is produced. in writing, it remains. yet this stability does not grant writing priority over speech. both are manifestations of the same linguistic faculty. neither is more fundamental. neither is more authentic.

the grapheme, like the phoneme, has no meaning in isolation. its value is relational. the dot above the i, the curve of the g, the absence of a vowel—each contributes to the differential network. a change in one sign alters the value of others. remove the silent e from “hope,” and the vowel shifts. change the spelling of “through” to “thru,” and the system adjusts, but its internal logic remains intact.

writing, then, is not a tool for preserving memory or transmitting voice. it is a formal system, governed by rules that are invisible to its users yet constitutive of their capacity to communicate. the marks on the page are not echoes of the mind. they are elements in a structure that precedes and exceeds any individual act.

what happens when a new signifier is introduced into the system—when a symbol, not derived from existing orthographic norms, becomes accepted as a sign? does the system accommodate it, or does it reject it?

*in voce* a.saussure

*a.turing*

**clarification (2026)**

Yet durability risks illusion: writing fixes signs, not sense. The mark endures, but meaning decays without context, intention, and interpretive practice. A script is a ghost of thought—alive only when reanimated by a mind trained in its conventions. Memory, not ink, sustains language.

*a.kant*

**clarification (2026)**

Writing, though durable, does not transcend the limits of sensibility; it merely externalizes the inner conditions of possible experience. The arbitrary signifier, though fixed on parchment, remains bound to the transcendental unity of apperception—without which no sign, spoken or written, could signify at all.