

Language is the ability to produce and comprehend both spoken and written (and in the case of sign language, signed) words. Understanding how language works means reaching across many branches of psychology—everything from basic neurological functioning to high-level cognitive processing. Language shapes our social interactions and brings order to our lives. Complex language is one of the defining factors that makes us human. Two of the concepts that make language unique are grammar and lexicon.

Grammar

Because all language obeys a set of combinatory rules, we can communicate an infinite number of concepts. While every language has a different set of rules, all languages do obey rules. These rules are known as grammar. Speakers of a language have internalized the rules and exceptions for that language's grammar. There are rules for every level of language—word formation (for example, native speakers of English have internalized the general rule that -ed is the ending for past-tense verbs, so even when they encounter a brand-new verb, they automatically know how to put it into past tense); phrase formation (for example, knowing that when you use the verb “buy,” it needs a subject and an object; “She buys” is wrong, but “She buys a gift” is okay); and sentence formation.

Lexicon

Every language has its rules, which act as a framework for meaningful communication. But what do people fill that framework up with? The answer is, of course, words. Every human language has a lexicon—the sum total of all of the words in that language. By using grammatical rules to combine words into logical sentences, humans can convey an infinite number of concepts.

The **five** main components of **language** are phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, syntax, and context. Along with grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, these components work together to create meaningful communication among individuals.