Structure and meaning

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Introductions

- Who am I?
- What is this module about?
- How is it going to run?

Overview

The problem of language structure

- How would a Martian figure it out?
- 'John did go to the shop'
- Auxiliary verbs such as 'did' always come after the first word in a sentence

The problem of language structure

- But what about...
- 'The man with the hat did go to the shop'
- We can't have 'The did man with the hat go to the shop'
- So how do we solve this problem?

How do we solve this problem?

- Analytic philosophy
- Breaking language down into its smallest units of meaning...
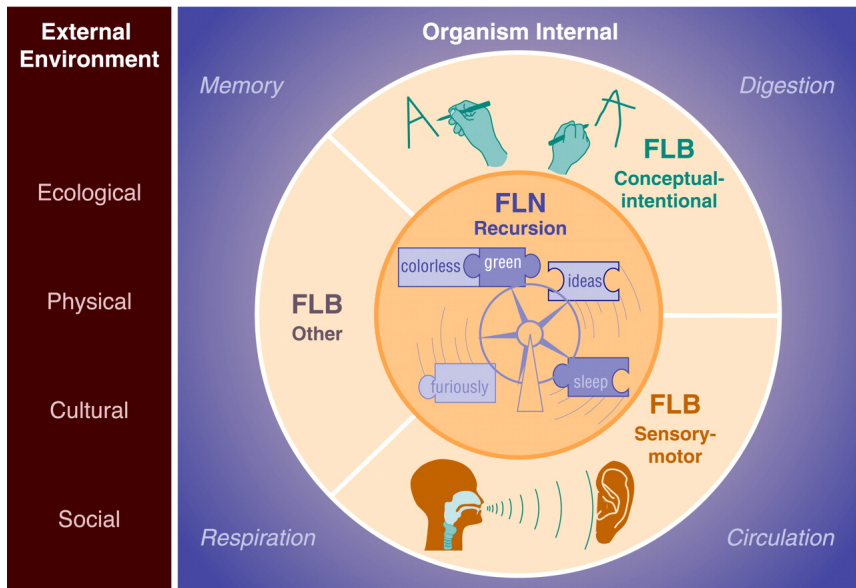- And building it back up again

Intuition

- Our intuitions are useful
- We know what sounds right, but we need to figure out why
- And when we say 'right' we mean what sounds right, not what we are told is right by dusty old grammar books...
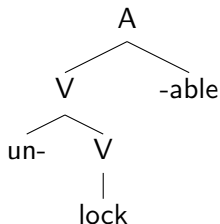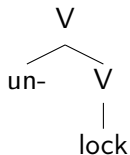
Where is language?

- I-language: the capabilities human beings have to construct linguistic structures in the brain (competence)
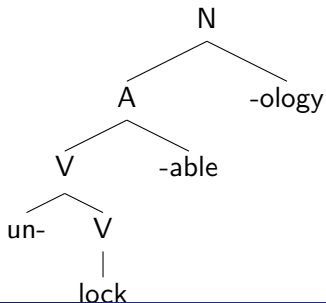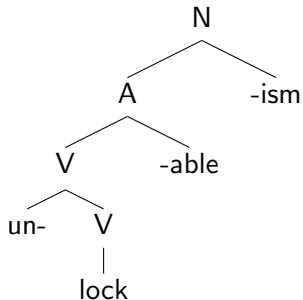- E-language: the externalisation of language (e.g. things that speakers say, also know as utterances/performance)

What is language?

Morphology and meaning

Morphology and meaning

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              N
            /   \
           A      -ism
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              N
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           A      -ology
         /   \
        V      -able
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     un-    V
            |
           lock
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Syntax and meaning

Hauser, M. D., Chomsky, N. & Fitch, W. T. (2002), 'The faculty of language: what is it, who has it, and how did it evolve?', *science* **298**(5598), 1569–1579.