



Discussion before Quiz 1

Nir Segal – February 20, 2026

Using the Canvas materials, prepare a discussion of the following.

1 Bee dances

- How many types of dances did you hear of?
- What are the functions of bee dances? What messages can they express?
- Is there variation across bee communities or subspecies?
- What are some differences between Italian and Austrian bees? Can they understand each other?
- What is the structure of the dances? Are there rules and a vocabulary?
- How much is instinctive, and how much is learned? What is evidence for that?

3 Apes

- How do the calls of velvet monkeys work? What is instinctive, and what do they have to learn?
- What attempts were made to teach apes a human language? How do we establish if they were successful?
- What was Vicky the chimp taught? What was the outcome?
- What is ASL, and why is it important for these experiments?
- What was successful in Koko's and Nim's language learning enterprise?
- What is evidence that their learning did not approach human language acquisition?
- What was the role of explicit teaching?

2 Birds

- What is the difference between a bird song and a bird call? What are their functions?
- Is there variation across species and communities?
- What is instinctive, and what has to be learned?
- What is the structure of bird songs? Why are they *holistic*?
- What are some mistakes that baby birds make while learning calls?
- Can you make an example of structure or rules in bird calls?
- Can Alex the parrot understand questions in English? Can we conclude that he learned English?

4 Humans

- At what pace does the size of a child's vocabulary grow?
- What do we mean by *rules* of a language?
- We said that human language "has no limits", what did we mean by that?
- How could you characterize a child's process of discovering the rules of a language?
- What is evidence that children do not just memorize a list of words?
- What is a consequence of the tendency of overgeneralizing rules over time?
- What is the basic word order rule of English? When do children acquire it?