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What is linguistics?

- **Linguistics** = the study of the universality and the variation of language across the planet
 - Interesting questions that surround the study
 - * *What aspects of language are innate, and what aspects are learned from the linguistic environment the person comes from?*
 - * *How does the capacity humans have for language relate to abilities that other members of the animal kingdom exhibit (echolocation, nest-building, coordinated migration, etc)?*
- Many different facets of language can be studied
 - Different aspects of language themselves (syntax, semantics, phonetics, etc)
 - The sociology/anthropology of languages in the world
 - The biological/psychological/phenomenological study of language usage and language acquisition
 - * **Critical period** = the stretch of time during which language acquisition seems to be incredibly accelerated and enabled by elements in a child's psychology or biology

What is language?

- Language has a *representation* in the form of sounds, symbols, or gestures
 - **Phonetics** = the study of the human ability to generate sound
- Language encodes meaning, and interpreting a language is a process of decoding that meaning
 - **Semantics** = the decoding of how units of language are organized to communicate meaning
 - **Pragmatics** = the decoding of implicature and of structures that denote higher level concepts like tone or intention
- There are also aspects of language that lie in between
 - **Lexicon** = the capacity the brain has to store information about the language (eg remembering words, grammar rules, etc)
 - * Part of language acquisition is learning the mapping from a continuous audio signal to a series of discrete units
 - * Importantly, all vocal languages have some concept of a **word**, because it's conceptually the only way the lexicon can grow