Today

- Rules, Linguistic competence vs. linguistic performance
- Design features
- Animal communication vs. human language
- Please write down this url:
  - http://media.animal.discovery.com/fansites/
  - petstar/videogallery/season3/ep309_winner.html
- Readings: 1.3, 1.4; 2.1-2.4
Linguistic competence

- What we know when we ‘know’ a language.
- This knowledge is largely unconscious.
How do we study linguistic competence?

By observing a speaker’s linguistic performance.
Grammar

- Descriptive grammar
  - Describes the rules that govern what people do or can say (their “mental grammar”)

- Prescriptive grammar
  - Prescribes rules governing what people should/shouldn’t say
Prescriptive rules

“Don’t end a sentence w/ preposition!”
“Don’t split infinitives!”
“Don’t use double negatives!”
Descriptive rules are linguists’ attempt to represent your mental grammar. Descriptive rules are natural, followed intuitively, need not be taught.

Prescriptive rules are not natural, must be learned by rote (in school).
language vs. communication
Design features

- Charles Hockett (1960)
- Characterize language, distinguish it from other communication systems
- If a system lacks even one feature, it is communication, not language
Design features

- Discreteness
- Arbitrariness
- Cultural transmission
- Displacement
- Interchangeability
- Productivity
Larger, complex messages can be broken down into smaller, discrete parts.

e.g., [pat] → [tap] [apt]

Discreteness
Arbitrariness

- There is no (necessary) connection between the *form* of signal and its *meaning*
  
e.g., ‘whale’ is small word for big animal, ‘microorganism’ is just the reverse
Cultural transmission

- At least some aspect of communication system is learned from other users

  e.g., child of French-speaking parents will learn French
Displacement

- Ability to talk about things not present in space or time

e.g., A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...
Interchangeability

- A user can both receive and broadcast the same signal

  e.g., speaker can be listener and vice versa
Productivity

- Speakers can create *infinite* number of *novel* utterances that others can understand

  e.g., “Little purple gnomes living in my sock drawer said, ‘Elvis lives’.”

Elvis lives!!
Vervet monkeys

- 3 alarm calls for different predators
  - ‘snake’
  - ‘eagle’
  - ‘leopard’

Young vervets make mistakes

http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~mnkylab/media/vervetcalls.html
Vervet communication

- Yes:
  - Arbitrariness, Cultural transmission, Interchangeability

- No:
  - Displacement, Productivity, Discreteness
‘Einstein’ the parrot

- At home: Watch the following clip of Einstein the parrot


What design features does he exhibit / fail to exhibit?
Multidimensionality

- Human language consists of several *levels* or *dimensions* of knowledge
- used by linguists to separate language into areas of study
  - not entirely “modular” or discrete (e.g., phonetics and phonology inform each other)
Core Subfields

- **Phonology**: the study of how speech sounds pattern and how they are organized (i.e., the sound system)

  e.g., art, *rta  (where ‘*’ = ungrammatical)
Core Subfields

- **Morphology**: the study of the formation of words.

  e.g., unhappiness $\rightarrow$ un-happy-ness
Core Subfields

- **Syntax**: the study of the structure of sentences.

  e.g., She hit the man with a hammer.
Core Subfields

- **Semantics**: the study of meaning in language.

- **Pragmatics**: the study of how linguistic meaning depends on context.