



# From 'speech' to 'gesture'

## A changing norm in 'language' research.

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# A definition of 'language': changing authors, changing norms.

## **(1910) Eds.**

Language, the whole body of words and combinations of words as used in common by a nation, people of race, for the purpose of expressing or communicating their thoughts; also, more widely, the power of expressing thought by verbal utterance.

## **(1951) Jespersen, Otto**

By language in the widest sense if the word is meant any means of communication between living beings. [...] We may distinguish two kinds of language [...] ear-language and eye-language, of which the former is by far the more important.

## **(1962, 1968) Trager, George L.**

Language may be defined as an arbitrary system of vocal symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in a culture, interact and communicate.

## **(1977, 1981, 2002, 2007) Robins, Robert H.**

Language, a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate

## **(2015) Britannica Online: Crystal, David**

Language, a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves.



# Hypothesis: The scientific practice was limited by an oral norm.

(1910) Eds.

verbal utterance.

(1951) Jespersen, Otto

ear-language

by far the more important

(1962, 1968) Trager, George L.

vocal symbols

(1977, 1981, 2002, 2007) Robins, Robert H.

spoken or written

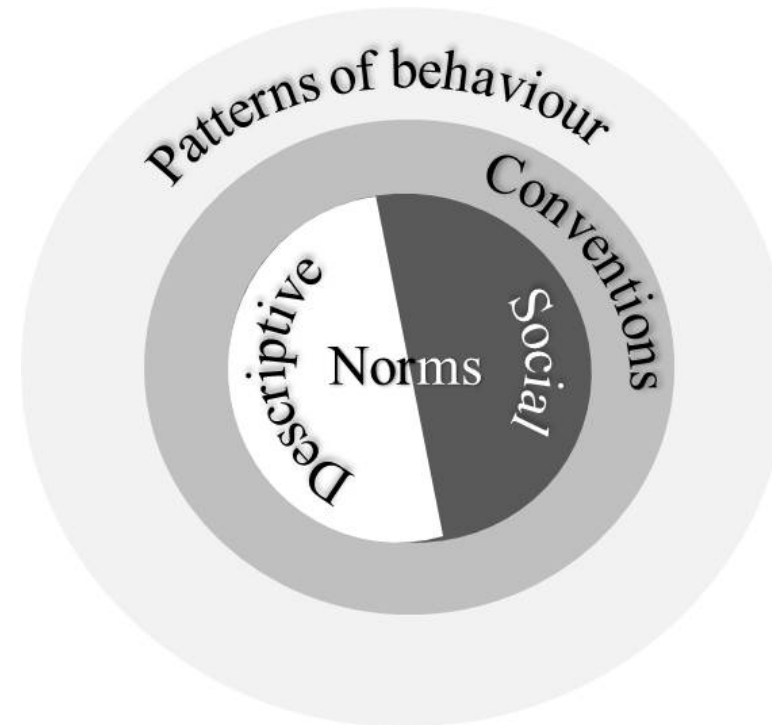


(2015) Britannica Online: Crystal, David

spoken, **manual**, or written


# Characteristics of norms.

- ❖ implicit
- ❖ expectation
- ❖ sanction
- ❖ right/appropriate vs. wrong/inappropriate
- ❖ desire independent
- ❖ core function: express shared values of what is commonly approved



(Southwood & Eriksson 2011; Bicchieri, 2006; Bicchieri & Muldoon, 2014; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991)

# Norm compliance is often not deliberate but unreflective.

MENU	Latin ▲	English
edit	NOUN <a href="#">lingua</a>   <a href="#">linguae</a>   <a href="#">linguae</a>	SYNO <a href="#">clapper</a>   <a href="#">glossa</a>   <a href="#">lingua</a>   <a href="#">tongue</a>
 	<a href="#">lingua</a> 	ling. language <lang.>
 	<a href="#">lingua</a> 	anat. tongue

- ❖ implicit
- ❖ expectation
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- ❖ desire independent
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## Britannica

- (1910) verbal utterance
- (1951) ear-language
- (1962, 1968) vocal symbols
- (1977 - 2007) spoken or written

guages of the world share every one of them. At first sight some appear so trivial that no one looking just at language would bother to note them. They become worthy of mention only when it is realized that certain animal systems—and certain human systems other than language—lack them.

The first design-feature—the “vocal-auditory channel”—is perhaps the most obvious. There are systems of communication that use other channels: for exam-  
(Hockett 1960)

# Expectations can be based on collective decisions.

- ❖ implicit
- ❖ expectations
- ❖ sanction
- ❖ right/appropriate vs. wrong/inappropriate
- ❖ desire independent
- ❖ core function: express shared values of what is commonly approved



1880, Milan >> *Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf*

(Van Cleve 1989, chap.10)

## Sanctions range from gossip to open censure.

- ❖ implicit
- ❖ expectation
- ❖ sanction
- ❖ right/appropriate vs. wrong/inappropriate
- ❖ desire independent
- ❖ core function: express shared values of what is commonly approved

“[...] the attempt to suppress it created a stigma towards sign language and a negative, **guilty attitude** about its use.”

(Gannon 2012, p.362)



“Even educated deaf people were **ashamed** of it [...] and in secret, they signed.”

(Maher 1996, p.55)

# Norms can be valued.

“The sign language, like writing, is a **substitute for speech**, not an independent or original method of communication.” (Kroeber 1958)

- ❖ implicit
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“Ideographic language systems, in comparison with verbal symbol systems, **lack precision, subtlety, and flexibility**. [...] Comparatively, a verbal language is more abstract.”

(Myklebust 1964 cited by Maher 1996, p.21)

“Speech belongs to the highest and most perfect of all communication systems, beside such **more deficient** ones, even extant in humans, such as gesture, sign, chime, or acoustic signal languages.” (Kainz, 1961, p.3)

“How little do they differ from animals! [...] how **inadequate and defective** is the language of gestures and signs which they must use!”

(Amman 1873, p.2)

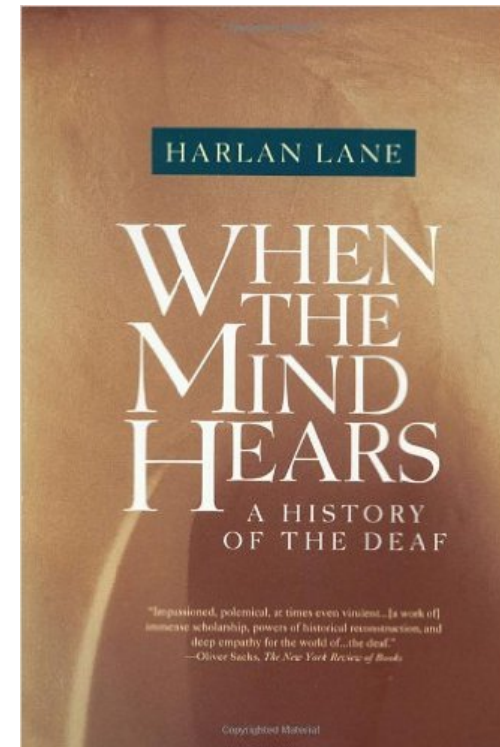
“[...] grotesque and **inefficient finger acrobatics!**”

(Goodhill 1947, p.559)



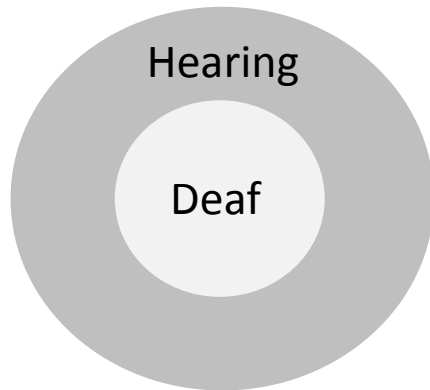
## Norms: Shared values of the groups majority.

- ❖ implicit
- ❖ expectation
- ❖ sanction
- ❖ right/appropriate vs. wrong/inappropriate
- ❖ desire independent
- ❖ core function: express shared values of what is commonly approved



“On the face of it, people are quite afraid of {human} diversity and look to social institutions to limit or eradicate it.” (p.xiii)

# In-groups constitute norms. Norms constitute evidence.



Signs are universal.

(Mallery, 1881)

There is no grammar

(cf. Woodward 1972)

Deafness leads to  
deficiency in abstraction.

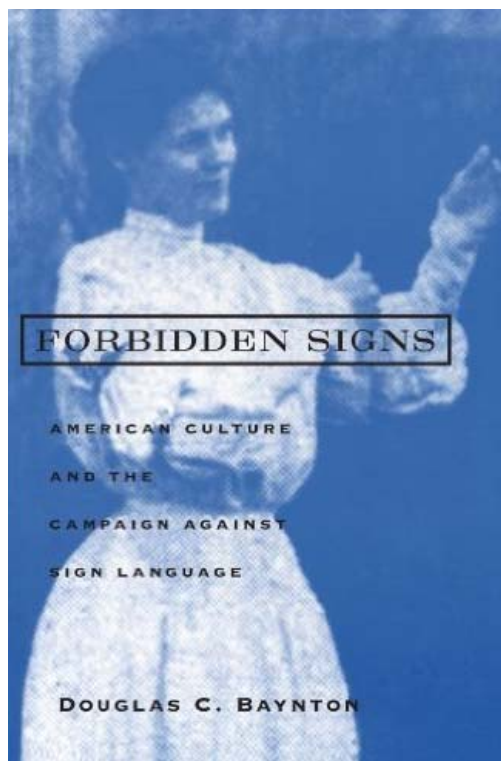
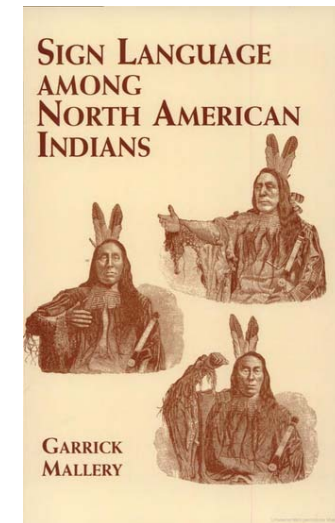
(Myklebust, Brutton 1953)

No more than 2000-5000 signs

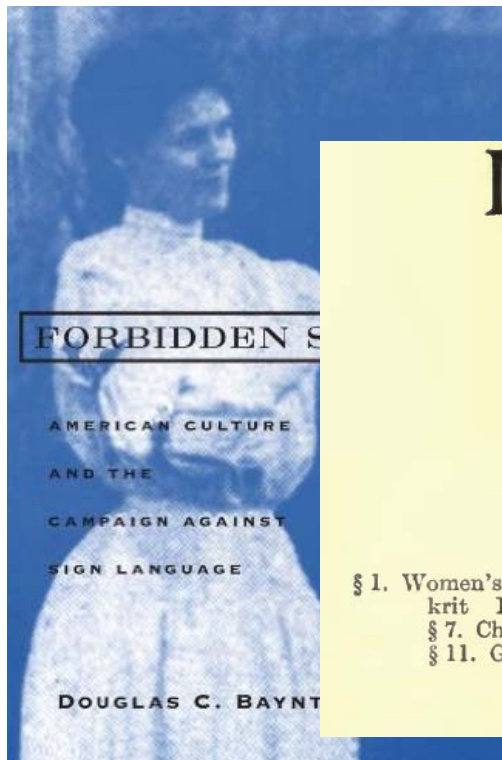
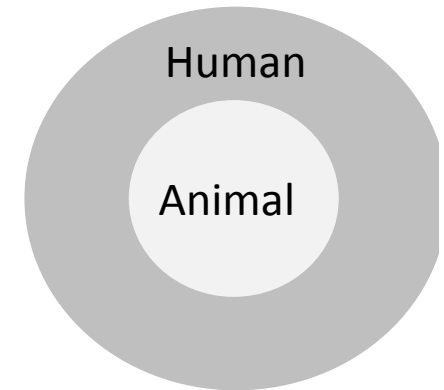
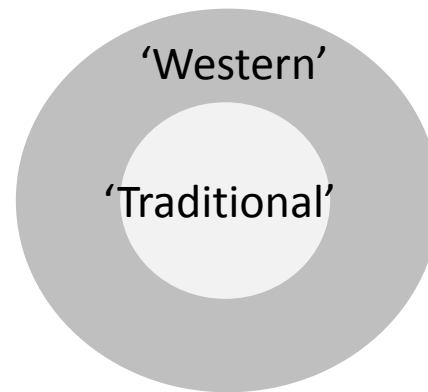
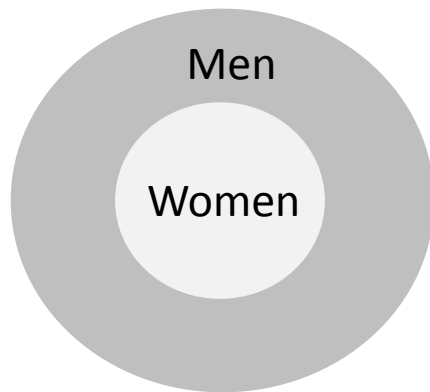
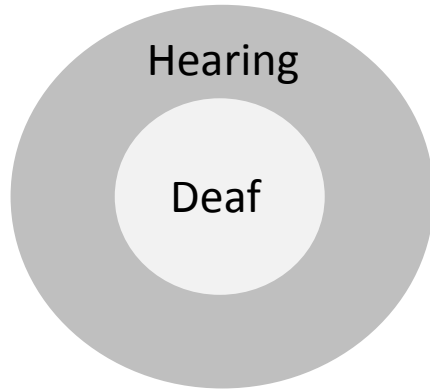
(Mendelson et al 1960)

sth. tested as superior?  
“Because of their less  
sophisticated approach”

(Furth, 1961)



Constitute norms >> define the term >> maintain social order.

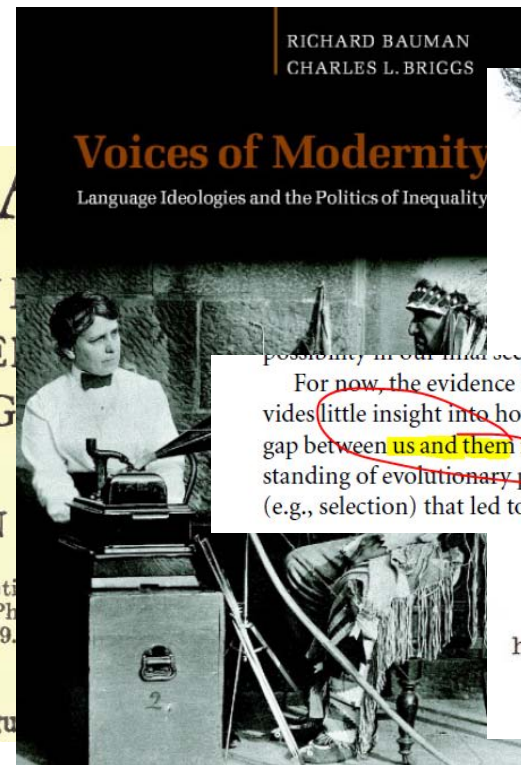


LANGUAGE  
ITS NATURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ORIGIN  
CHAPTER XIII  
THE WOMAN

§ 1. Women's Languages. § 2. Tabu. § 3. Competition. § 4. Drama. § 5. Conservatism. § 6. Phonology. § 7. Choice of Words. § 8. Vocabulary. § 9. Syntax. § 10. Grammar. § 11. General Characteristics.

XIII.—§ 1. Women's Languages

(Jespersen 1922)

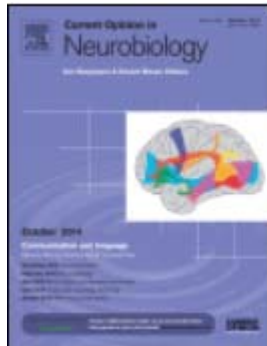


possibility in our mind section.  
For now, the evidence from comparative animal behavior provides little insight into how our language phenotype evolved. The gap between **us and them** is simply too great to provide any understanding of evolutionary precursors or the evolutionary processes (e.g., selection) that led to change over time.

(Hauser et al., 2014)

how **Homo** became **sapiens**  
on the evolution of thinking  
PETER GÄRDENFORS

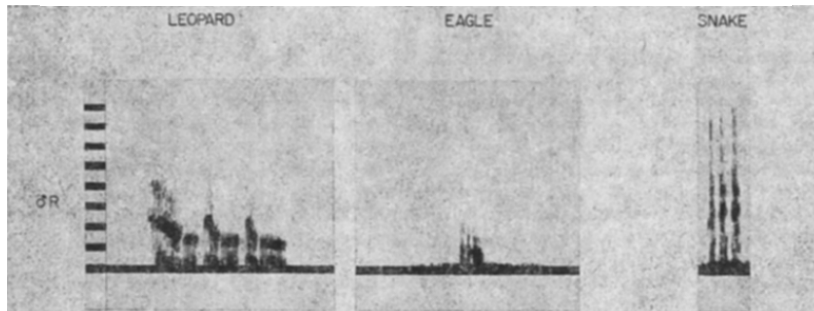
# Illustration: The oral norm affects research on animals.



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Edited by Michael S Brainard and W Tecumseh Fitch

*Anim. Behav.*, 1980, 28, 1070-1094

## VERVET MONKEY ALARM CALLS: SEMANTIC COMMUNICATION IN A FREE-RANGING PRIMATE



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Current Opinion in  
Neurobiology

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<b>The Cover</b> An impression of the modern view on the language-relevant fiber tracts, based on diffusion tractography. Credit: Alexander Backus and Peter Hagoort.			

# Take home: Norms are not innocent.



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# Thanks!

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