

## 2 Culture, languages, and language

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Language study immediately confronts us with the diversity of languages. Is it conceivable that there could be a single faculty for language with a possibly biological origin when it is clear that human beings use radically different communication systems? Languages are systems which possess their own internal logic. Though it is no doubt absurd to think that a few individuals might have invented them by design, it can at least be argued that they are the emergent results of a need to communicate. The members of a community contrive to understand each other by using words to refer to objects; then they put words together so as to express thoughts; gradually agreement is reached on the meanings and a new language appears. This way of seeing things would mean that human communication systems are more or less independent of one another; and that the only necessary feature common to languages would be the straightforward urge to communicate and be understood. On the other hand, if there really is a genuine faculty for language which lays down the specifications for a human code of communication, then an examination of languages in all their diversity and their resemblances is a very good way of outlining the limits of such a predisposition.

### 2.1 Why are there many languages?

On a radio broadcast one day a child asked why all human beings do not speak the same language. The answer given mentioned the arbitrariness of signs and the variability it leads to. However, no language is reducible to its lexicon; and across the whole range of languages, there is also a great diversity of phonological and syntactical structures, as there is of the complex rules which govern their use. How can human beings have created communication systems that are at once so different from each