

What Makes Human Language Special

	Human Language	Animal calls
Refers to things	✓	✓
Learned, not fixed	✓	✓
Combines units (a few sounds → many words)	✓	~
Displacement (talk of the absent, past, future)	✓	✗
Open-ended (infinite new sentences)	✓	✗
Recursion (sentences inside sentences)	✓	✗

Many animals communicate; only we (as far as we know) combine a few sounds into unlimited new meanings, and speak of what isn't here.