

# The invisible hand theory

Principles of language change

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# Factors influencing language change

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- Prestige and expressivity
- Communicative need
- Ease of activation
- Drive for symmetry
- Analogy
- Habituation
- Entrenchment

What is language?

1. A natural entity?

2. An artefact?

# Language is a natural phenomenon

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Languages are organisms of nature; they have never been directed by the will of man; they rose, and developed themselves according to definite laws; they grew old, and died out. They, too, are subject to that series of phenomena which we embrace under the nature of 'life'. The science of language is consequently a natural science; its method is generally altogether the same as that of any other natural science.

[August Schleicher 1863]

# Language is a natural phenomenon

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The desire of communication is a real living force, to the impelling action of which every human being, in every stage of culture, is accessible; and so far as we can see, it is the only force that was equal to initiating the process of language-making, as it is also the one that has kept up the process to the present time. It works both consciously and unconsciously, as regards the further consequences of the act.

[William Dwight Whitney 1967]

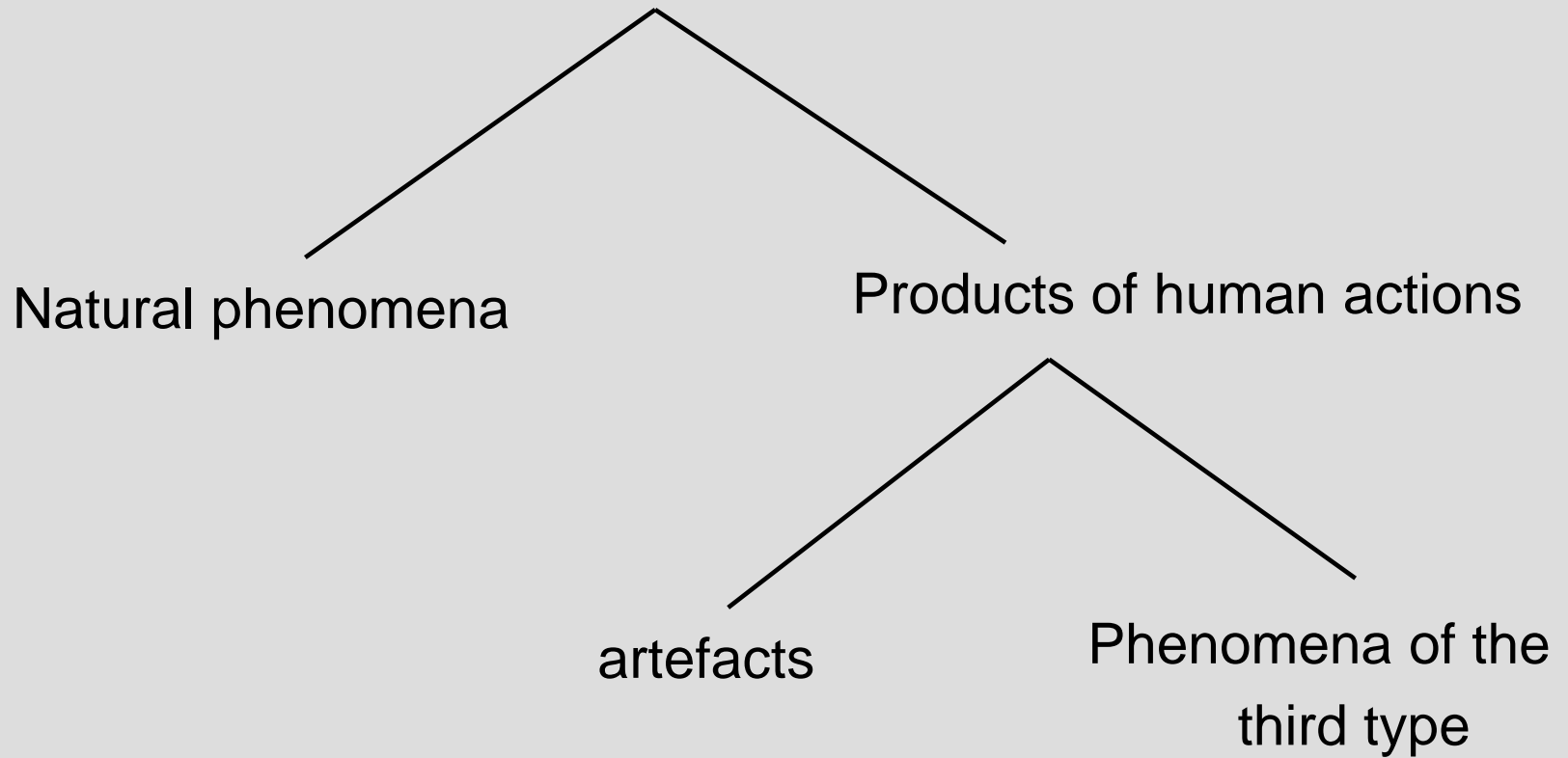
# Language as phenomenon of the third type

'Man-made' things can be the result of goal-directed human activities, or they can emerge as un-intended consequences of collective human activities.

[Rudi Keller]

# Typology of entities

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# Language is phenomenon of the third type

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Language is a habitual behavior that emerges 'invisible-handedly' as a phenomenon of the third type, without a plan or the intention to create it, through the natural behavior patterns of humans, according to the known principles of human nature.

[Rudi Keller]











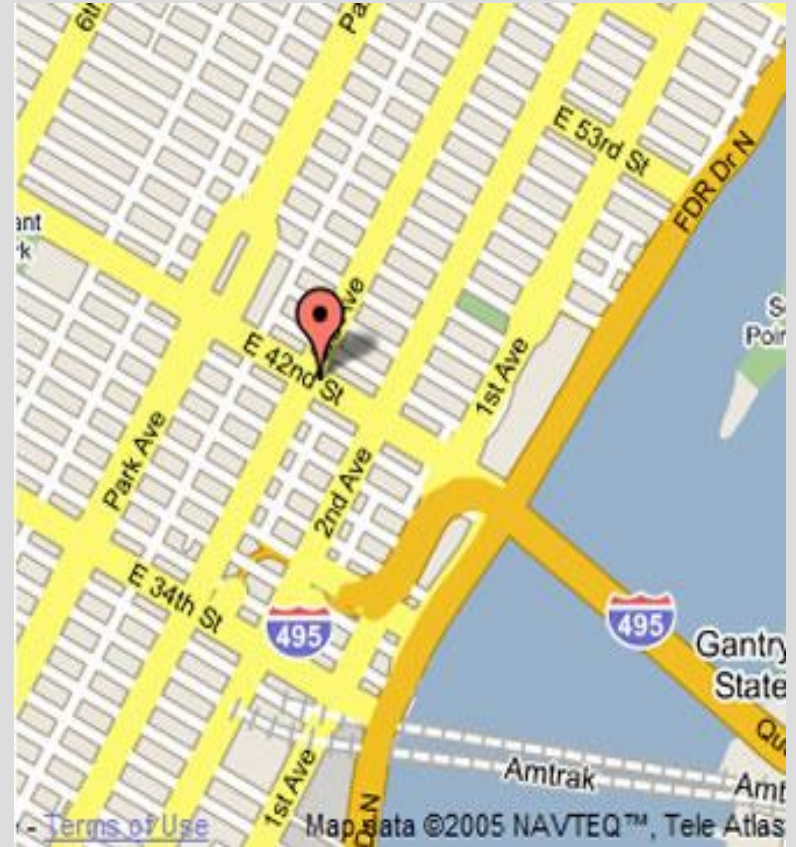
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# Phenomena of the third type

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In order to account for phenomena of the third type, we have to distinguish a micro level from a macro level:

1. Goals and intentions of individuals
2. Result that emerges from multiple individual actions

# Language: A phenomenon of the third type

In order to account for language change, we have to distinguish ...

1. ... speakers' intentional use of language (micro level).
2. ... development of linguistic structure through collective communicative process (macro level).



# Language: A phenomenon of the third type

Language is an emergent phenomenon.

[Hopper 1987]

Linguistic structure is shaped by language use.

[Bybee 2010]

# Economy and explicitness

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**Principle of economy:** speakers tend to keep the communicative effort to a minimum in order to accomplish their goals. This may lead to the phonological reduction of the linguistic signal.

**Principle of explicitness:** speakers have to make sure that the linguistic signal is sufficient to convey enough information to accomplish their communicative goal. This may lead the addition of lexical material to the linguistic signal.