

Handout 7 Pinker 2000, pp. 23-91

1 Discuss the following graph from Pinker's book.



2 How would, according to Pinker, the following listemes be represented in our language faculty?

- quacked
- gone with the wind
- duck

cooked

- duck-billed platypuses

3 Why do speakers disagree about an adequate inflection of the following words?

- mother-in-law (pl.)
- gin-and-tonic (pl.)
- *passer-by* (pl.)
- 4 Discuss inflectional properties of English and German comparing the following two verbs.
 - sprech, sprechen, spreche, sprach, sprich, sprichst, spricht, sprecht, spracht spräche, ...
 - speak, spoke, speaks, speaking.

How about the verb to be?

5 Explain to each other the allomorphy behind the English past-tense and plural formation and argue which modules in our language faculty are involved in what order when applying them.

- 6 Why does Pinker consider language change through time to be like the Broken Telephone / Chinese Whisper game?
- 7 Why, according to Pinker, are the suffixes -ing and possessive -s so regular?
- 8 What, according to Pinker, do the following English and German words have in common?
 - Fuß, Kuh, Magen
 - foot, goose, tooth
- 9 Which lexically unrelated but seemingly close words are eluded to in the following poem?

Turn over on your side, my dear, And tuck your foot behind your ear; And I, meanwhile, will crouch like this And give your neck a tender kiss. Let's see now-let your arms go slack And clasp your hands behind my back; I'll reach around and drape my knee Across your shoulder-goodness me! I must confess, this is a stretch, But honeybunch, you mustn't kvetch. I know it hurts, I know it smarts---But these arcane erotic arts Don't yield their secrets right at first; And now, I think, we're past the worst. So please don't throw a ONE, sweet miss-The MANY says we'll soon reach bliss.11

- 10 Why are the following four verbs irregular in many languages and among the most frequent words in general?
 - be do - have - go
- 11 Explain why Grimm named one set of verbs 'strong' and the other 'weak'?
- 12 What does the following cartoon tell us about creative inflection by analogy?

