

A corollary of arbitrariness – of association between sound sequences and meanings or in the order of words in phrases – is duality. Because there is nothing about the pronunciation of the word one (transcribed phonetically as it sounds – it would be wan]) that necessarily associates it with the numeral 1, that same sequence of sounds (but spelled won) can also be used to mean something entirely different, the past tense of the verb win (Bolton, 1982: 5). Reliance on context is a crucial property of languages, not just in figuring out the meaning of words like one and won, but in interpreting the meaning of entire utterances. That context could be the sentence or sentences that immediately precede it, or it could be the broader physical or social circumstances in which the sentence is uttered. Languages rely on the connection between form (what is said) and context (when, where, by whom, and to whom it is said) to communicate much more than is contained in a sequence of words. The meaning of a sentence depends crucially on the context in which it is uttered.