Ten fundamental characteristics of human language as system of communications
(Charles Hockett)

- Human language is learned
  1) acquired through cultural transmission
  2) speakers of one language can learn another

- . . . is discrete – language consists of minimal units

- . . . is recombinable – these minimal units can be combined in infinite varieties

- . . . is unconscious/intuitive – structural knowledge of a language is not necessarily conscious or articulated by its speakers

- . . . is interchangeable – any speaker potentially can create and utter any message

- . . . is reflexive – people can talk about language; language has the ability to refer to itself

- . . . is arbitrary – meaning depends on arbitrary association of meaning with sign or symbol, on conventions shared by sender and receiver of message

- . . . is redundant – language contains redundant communicative elements (message may be conveyed or reinforced twice in same utterance)

- . . . can displace – language can convey imaginary, distant, past, present, future, conjectural, and/or counterfactual statements (including lies)

- . . . is productive – a speaker can create totally novel statements and a listener can understand them