

A world map with a light blue background and green landmasses. Numerous small red dots are scattered across the map, representing linguistic data points. The dots are most densely clustered in the Pacific region, particularly around the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Malay Archipelago. Other clusters are visible in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australia. The text is overlaid on the map.

The message and its meaning

– *the linguistic perspective* –

Michael Cysouw

Human Language

- About 7000 languages currently spoken
- Why are there so many languages?
- Why is there not just one language?

If language would exist to convey messages, then there should be only one language

A world map showing the distribution of languages, represented by numerous red dots scattered across all continents. The map uses a light blue color for oceans and various shades of green and brown for landmasses. The dots are most densely packed in Europe, Africa, and Asia, with significant clusters in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Americas.

**“a language is a dialect
with an army and a navy”**

Max Weinreich

**How does language deal
with defectors/free riders ?
(‘liars’)**

What is language ?

- A system of signals that conveys **information**
- Signal can lead to reaction (“communication”)
- Signal identifies its sender (“identification”)

*Ich möchte Sie bitten auf diese
Argumente Bezug zu nehmen*

Ey, rockst du, Ian, Alter

Functions of signals

- **Identification**

interpretation of who is the sender

- **Communication**

only works then identification is accepted
(faking identification is difficult!)

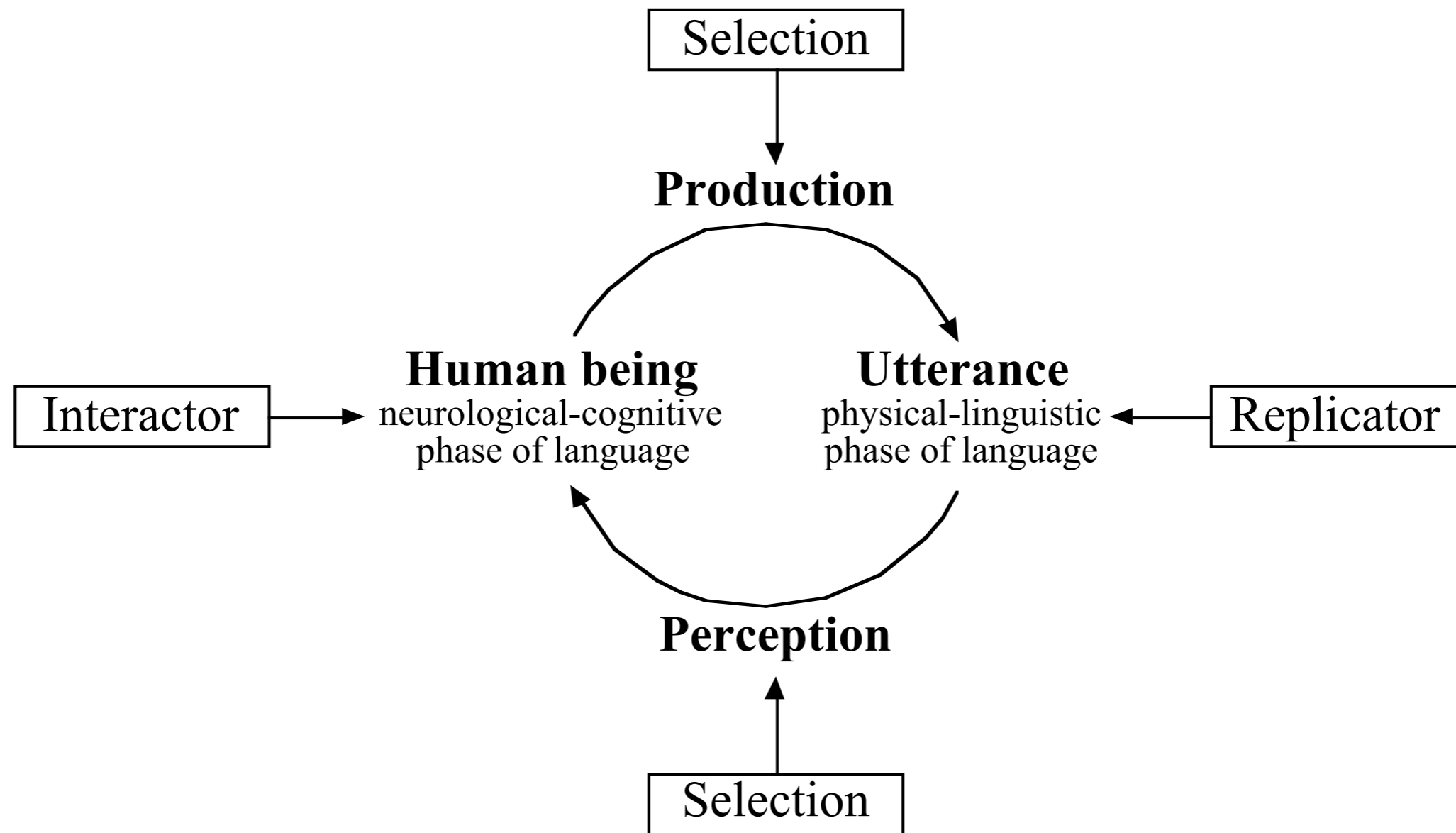
Functions of signals

- **Identification**
leads to speciation of signals
(independent of biological speciation)
- **Communication**
leads to unification of signals
(via 'borrowing' or 'free riding')

**Any (reasonably complex ?)
symbol system will start
functioning as a replicator
and lead to speciation**

Theory of Utterance Selection

(Croft 2000)



•Dawkins, Richard. 1976. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

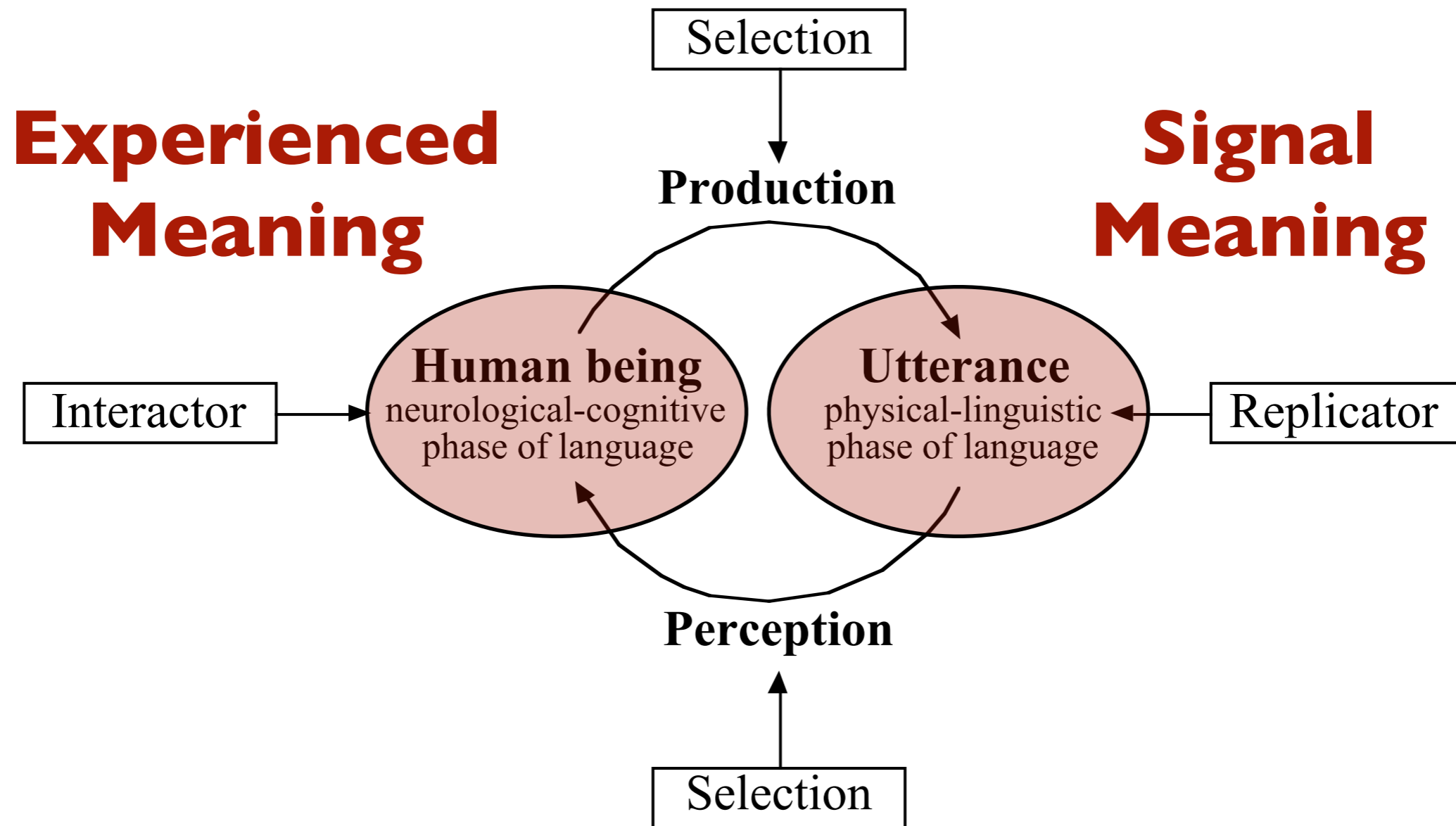
•Hull, David L. 1988. *Science as a Process: An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

•Croft, William. 2000. *Explaining Language Change: An Evolutionary Approach*. Harlow: Longman.

•Cysouw, Michael. 2006. review of "Explaining Language Change," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 128(2): 298-306.

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