

# Worlds of words

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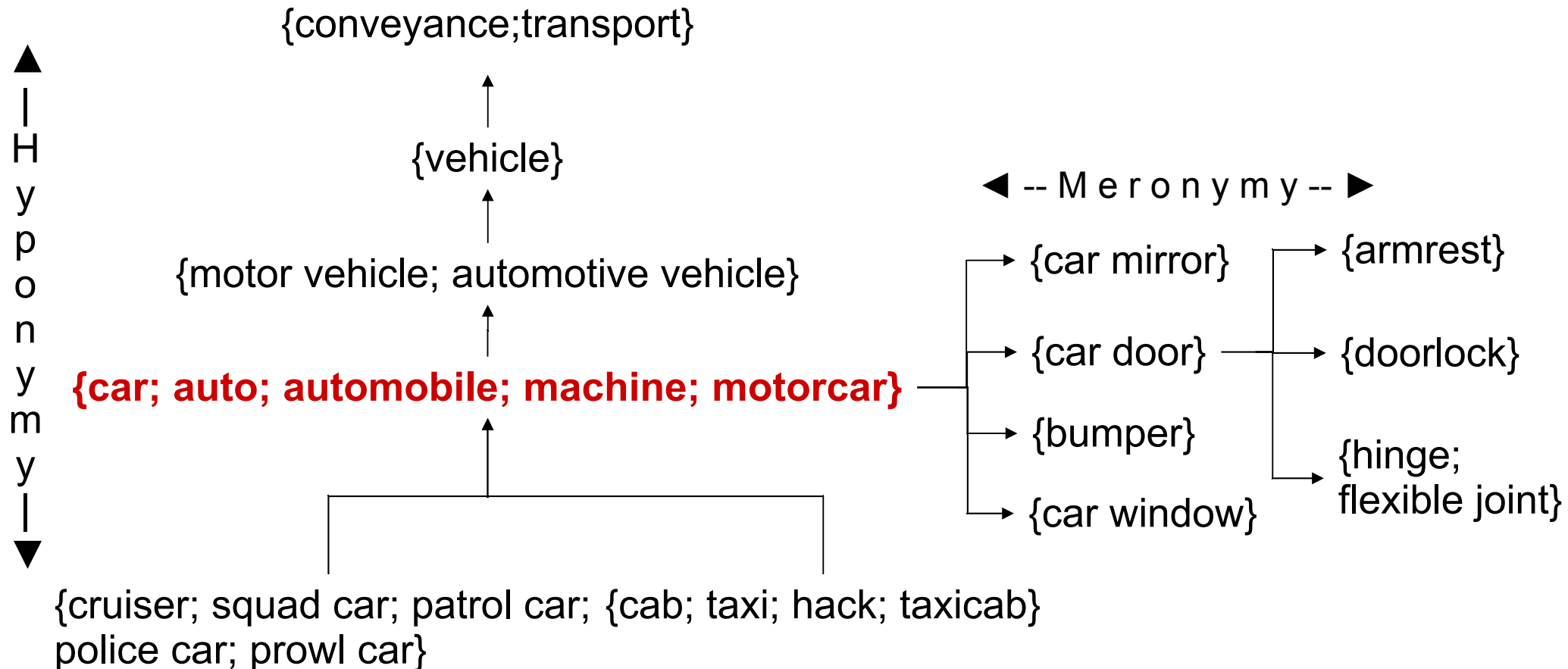
# Worlds of words

- Small world networks tend to be more efficient through hubs and robust as long as hubs are not attacked
- The words of languages can be viewed as networks in many different ways:
  - Words connected to each other on the basis of their **form**: *paard, baard, waard, kaart, vaart, gaart, maart* (see Jeronimus, Westerveld, van den Berg and van Leeuwen 2009 for Japanese Kanji)
  - Words connected by their **co-occurrence in text**
  - Words connected by their **meaning**

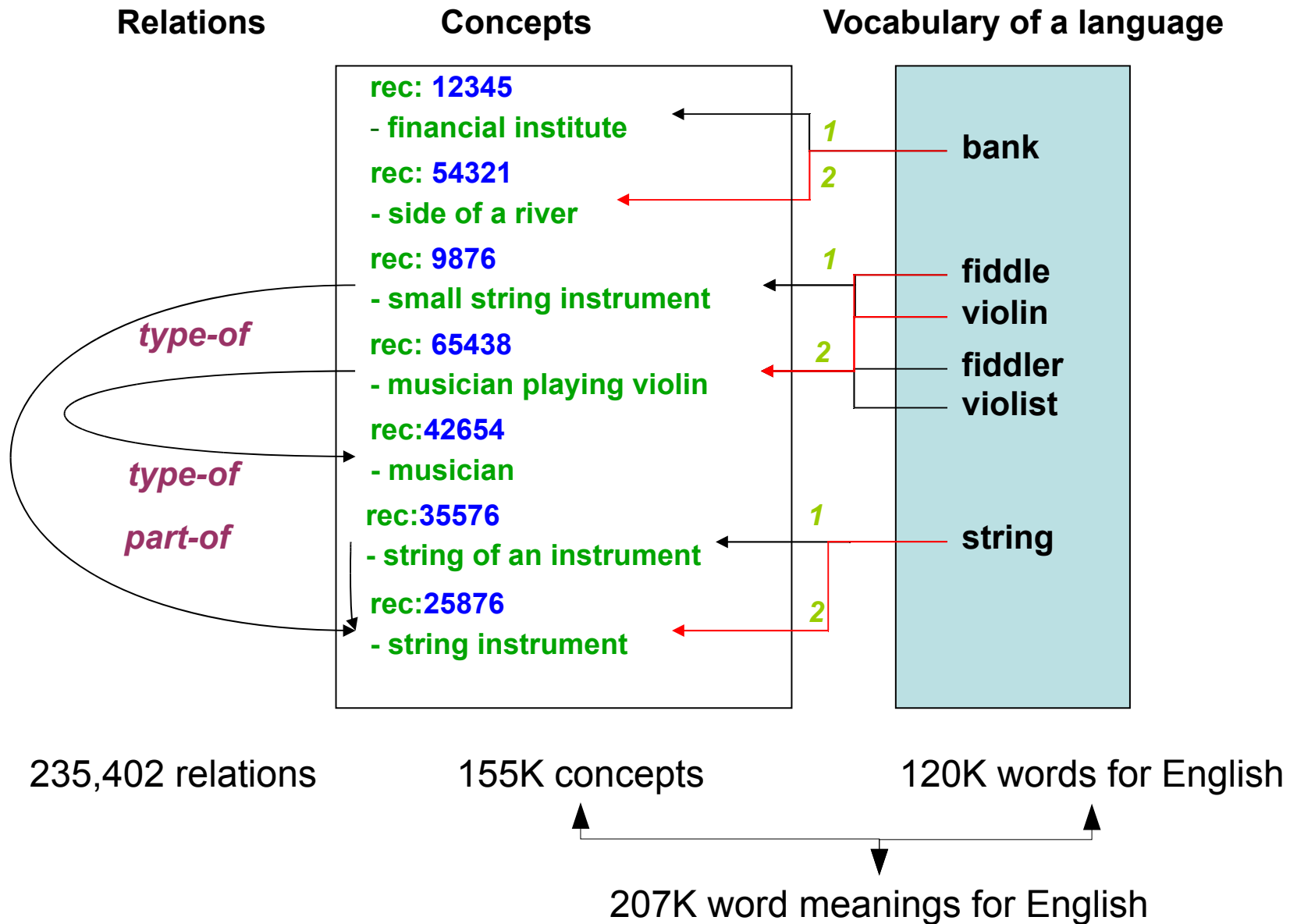
# Word networks of co-occurrence

- Study by Ferrer I Cancho & Solé
- Words are the vertices and their context words in text constitute relations:
  - “look at the size of the **head** of the **crocodile** and see its tail also protruding from the water”
  - “Walking the long haul to the **head** of the **traffic jam**”
  - “The **head** of the **department** will report to the directorate”
- “head” will have many connections e.g. to “department”, “traffic jam” and “crocodile”
- Co-occurrence patterns represent important semantic structures which show small world properties.
- The most frequent words with most meanings (e.g. head has 30 meanings) are the hubs!!

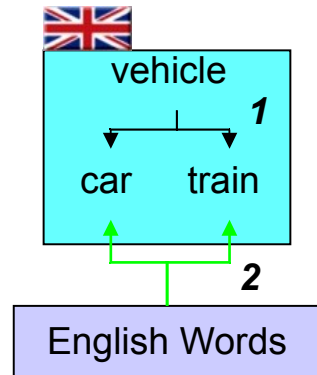
# Wordnet: a network of word meanings



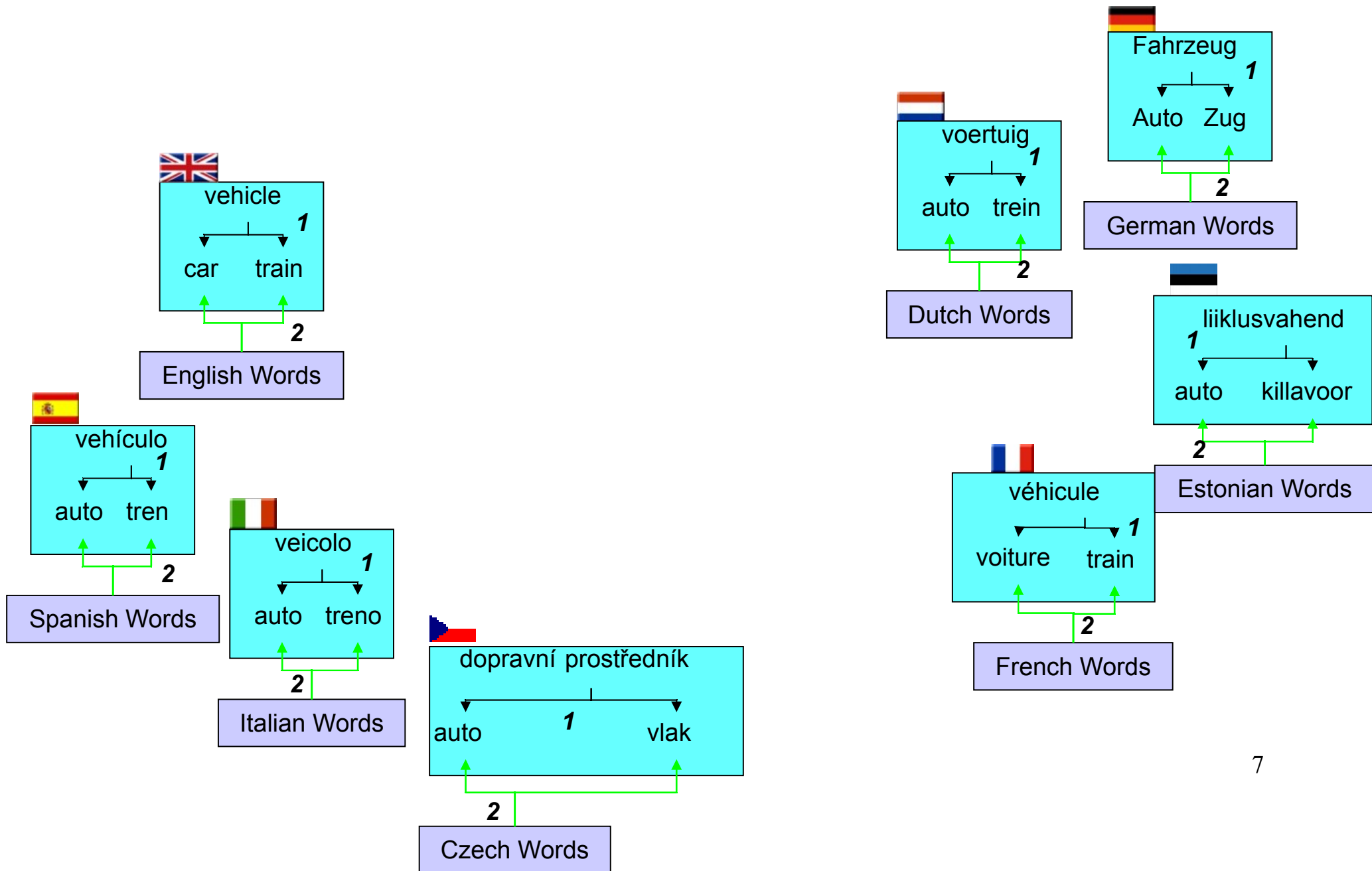
# Wordnet Data Model



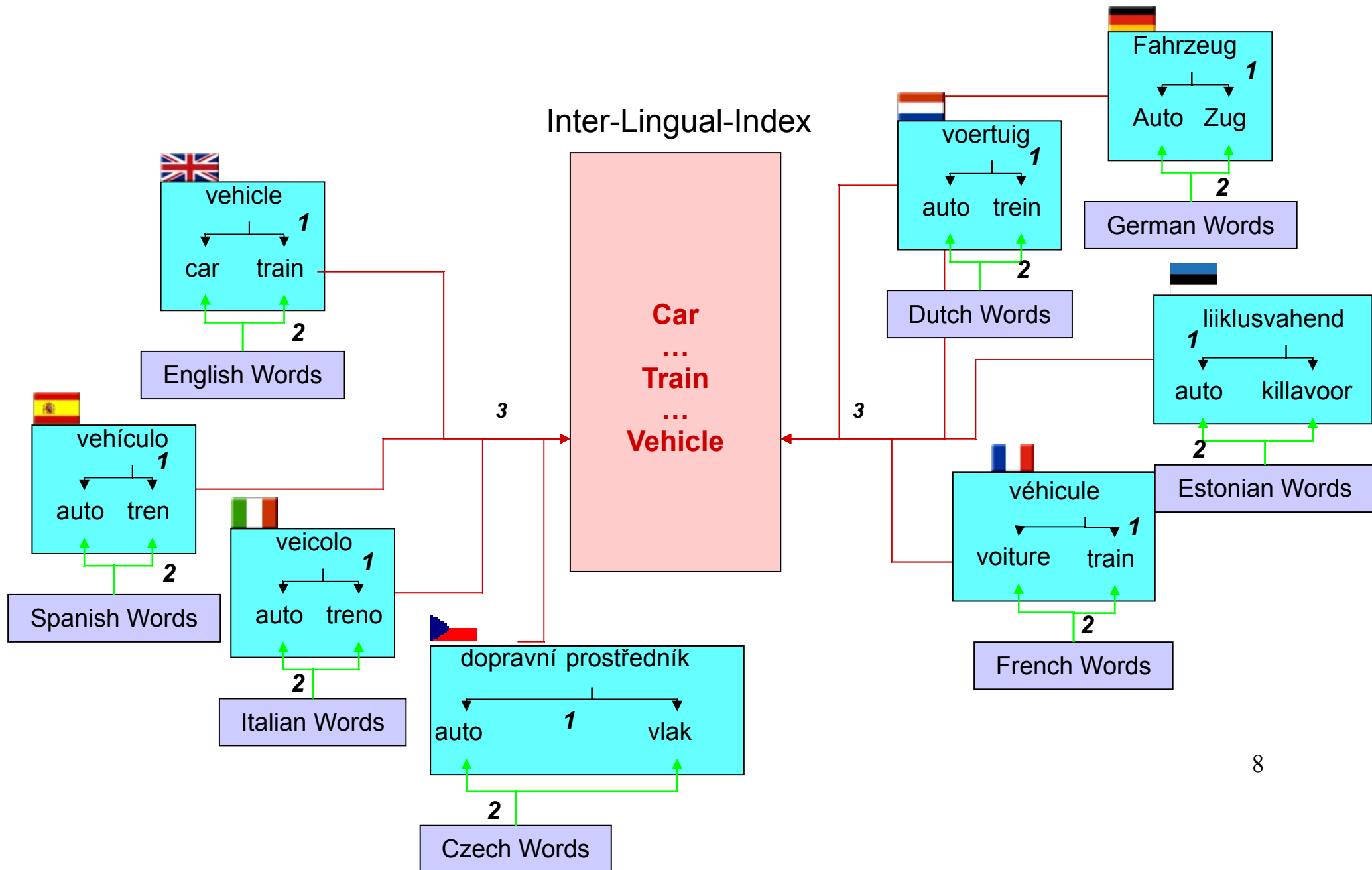
# Cross-lingual wordnet model



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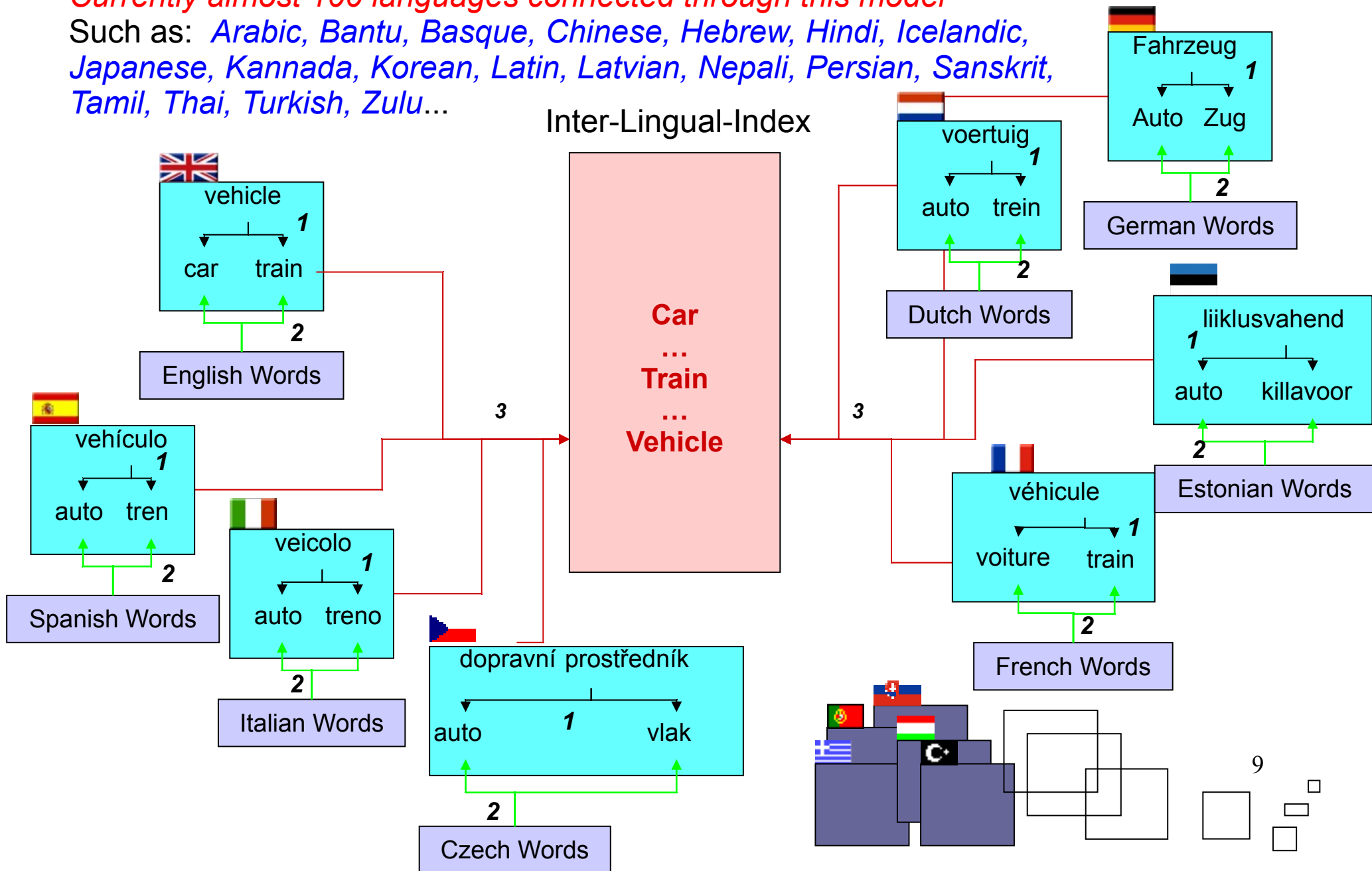




# Cross-lingual wordnet model

Currently almost 100 languages connected through this model

Such as: Arabic, Bantu, Basque, Chinese, Hebrew, Hindi, Icelandic, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Latin, Latvian, Nepali, Persian, Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Zulu...



# Cross-lingual wordnet model

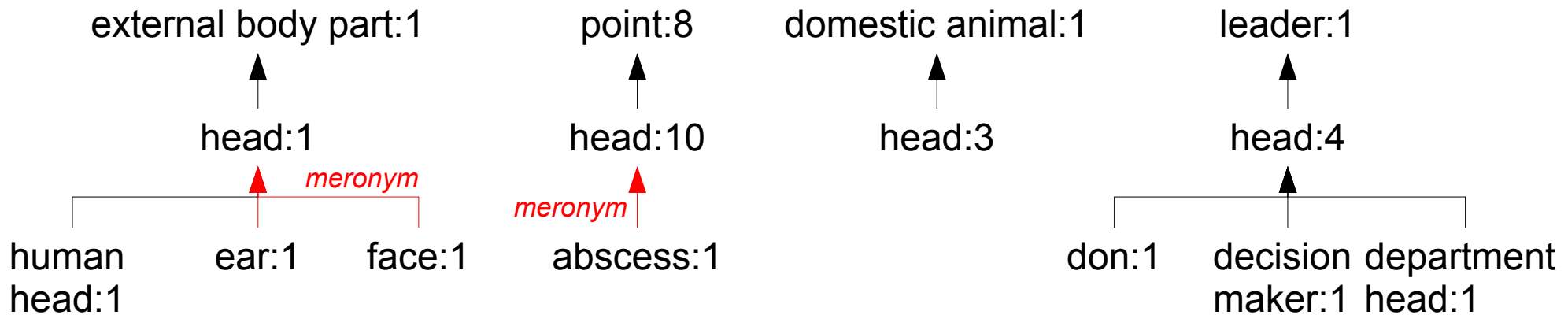
- Vocabularies of languages are unique networks of forms and concepts, both cultural and linguistic artifacts
- Vocabularies also show universal properties of their network structure
- Linking vocabularies to concepts provides unique opportunities for studying universals and idiosyncrasies of linguistic and conceptual structures

# Network properties of wordnets

- Study by Sigman and Cecchi (2001):
  - Vertices are wordnet concepts for nouns (66K)
  - Edges are:
    - Semantic relations between concepts: hypernyms, meronyms
    - Form relations between concepts: polysemy, e.g. head (30), line (29), point (24)
- All relation sets show a scale-invariant distribution when correlating nr. of concepts with number of links (power-law behavior)
- Hypernym relations as a basis, while adding meronyms, polysemy and random links

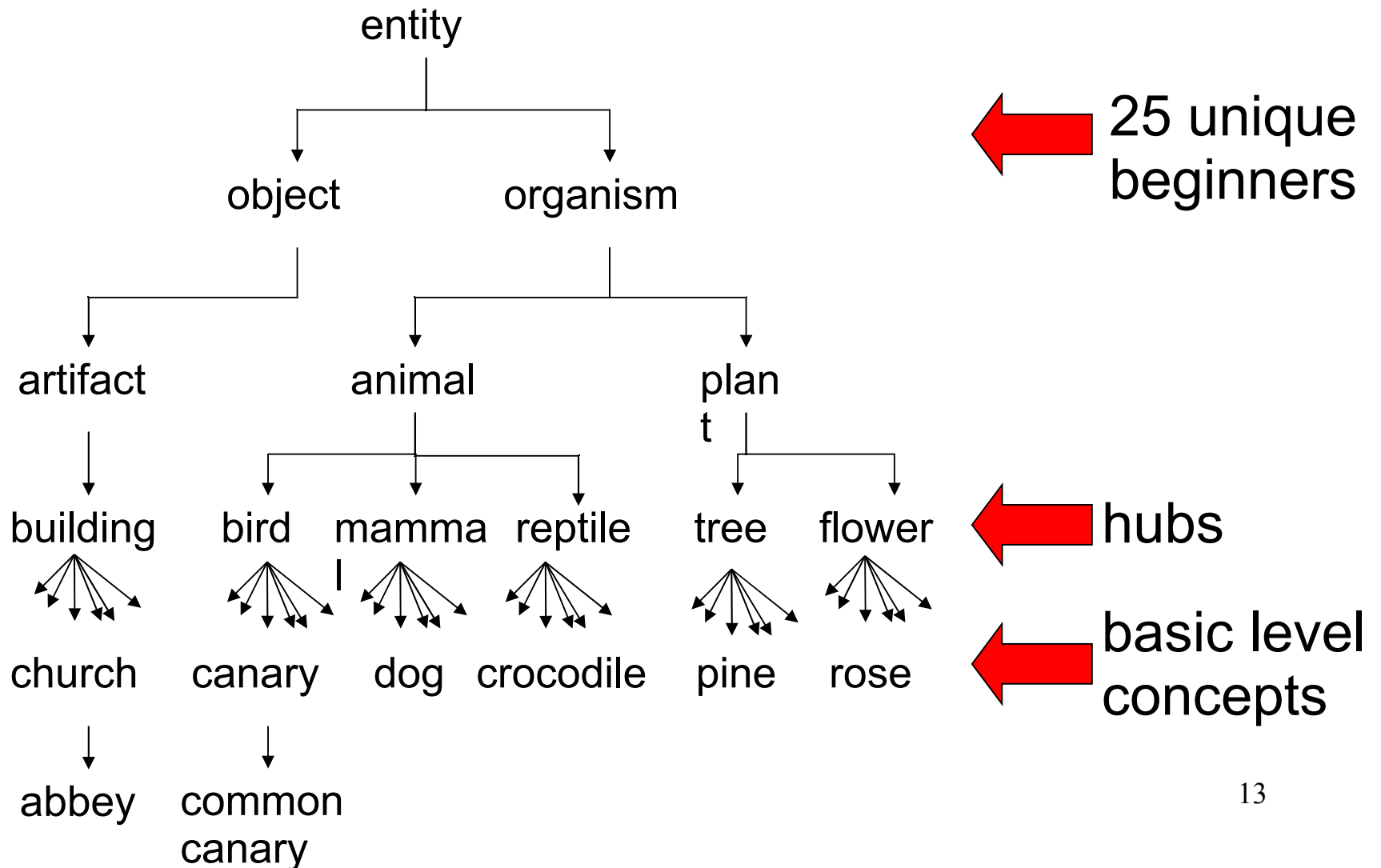
# Network properties of wordnets

- Conclusion: adding polysemy creates a *smaller* world:
  - Reduces characteristic length (average min. distance) from 11.9 to 7.4 (semi-random is 8.5)
  - Increases the clustering from 0.0002 to 0.06
- What does it mean that most ambiguous words form small world hubs with underspecified meanings?



# Overall structure of wordnets

## Traditional cognitive model

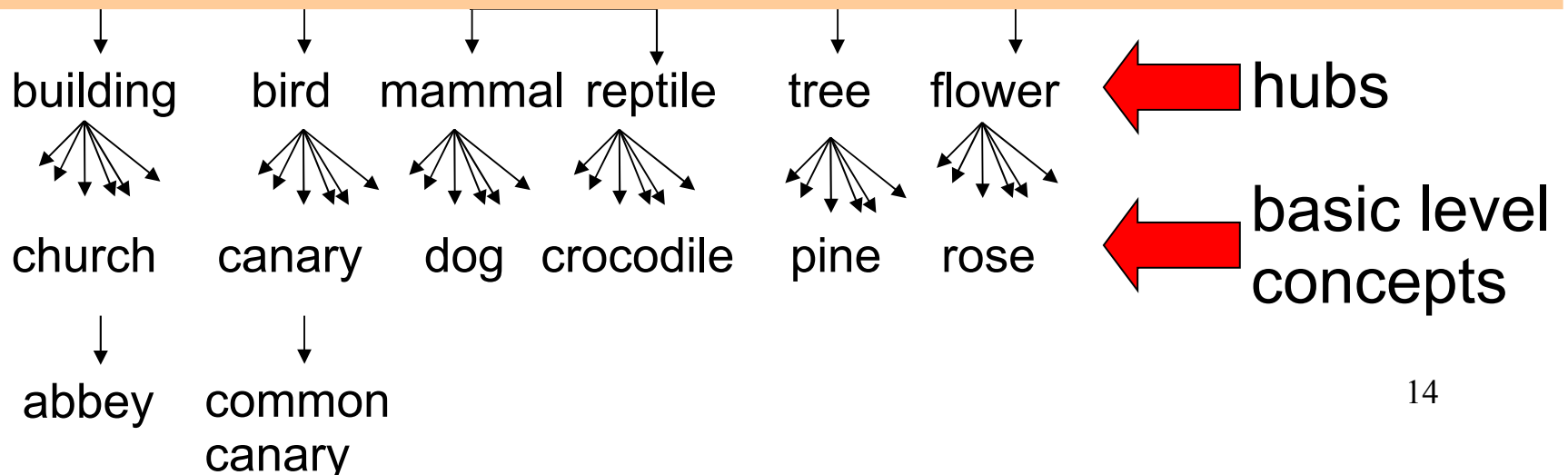


# Overall structure of wordnets

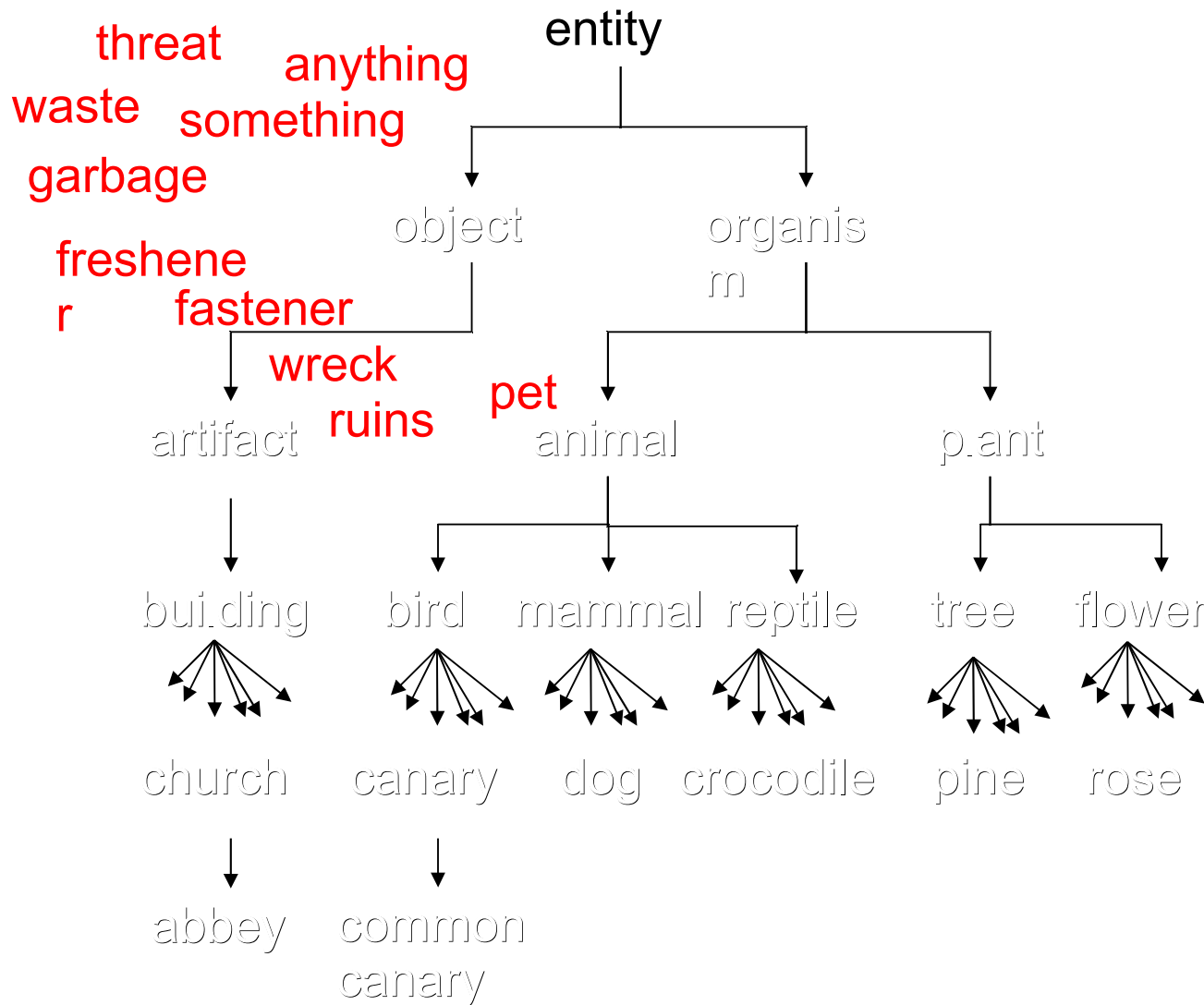
## Traditional cognitive model

### → Basic level concepts

- Categories are formed as a balance of two principles:
  - predict most features
  - apply to most subclasses
- Level where most concepts are created
- Level that amalgamates most parts
- Most abstract level where you can still draw a picture



# Overall structure of wordnets

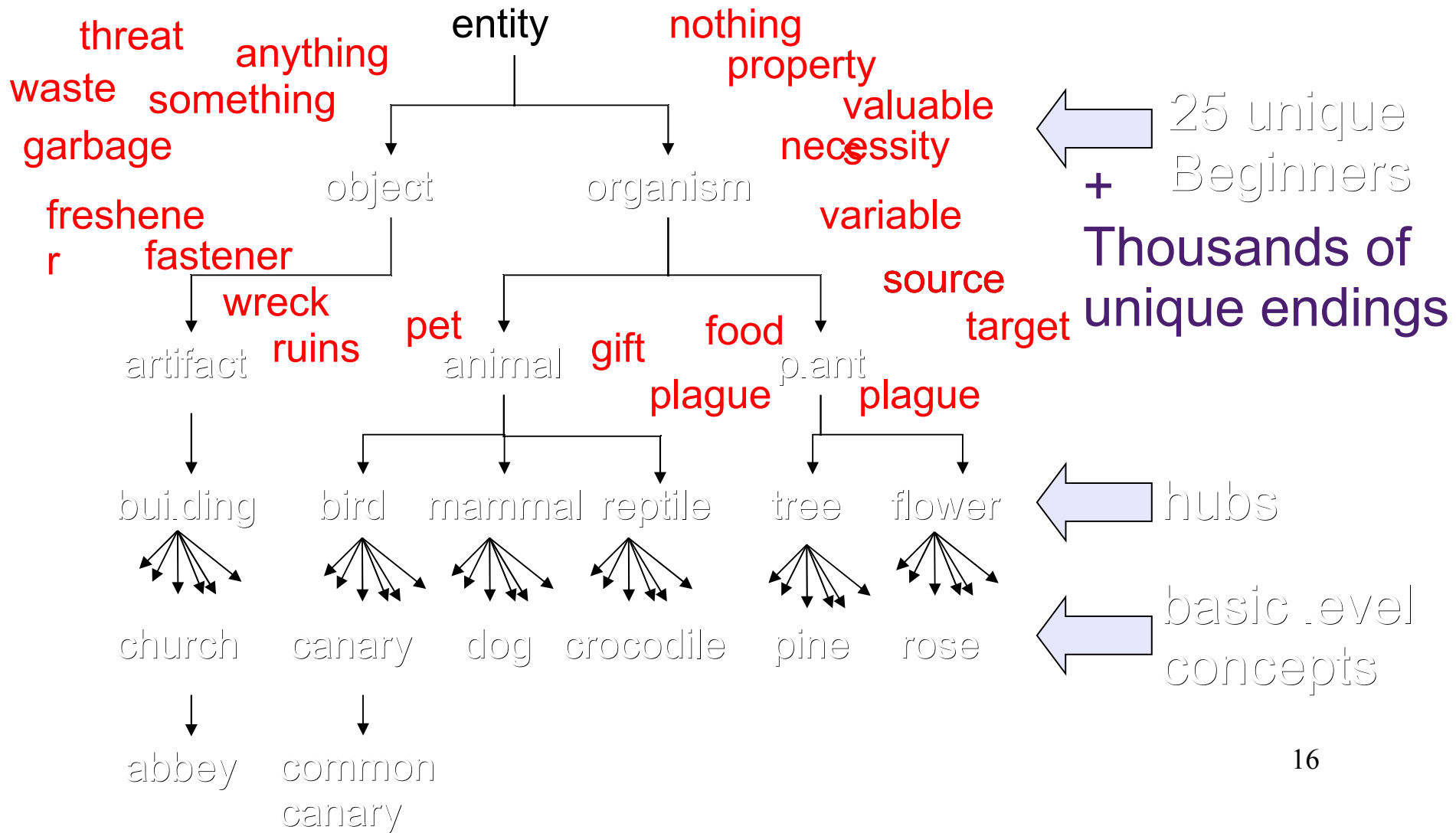


← 25 unique  
+ Beginners  
Thousands of  
unique endings

← hubs

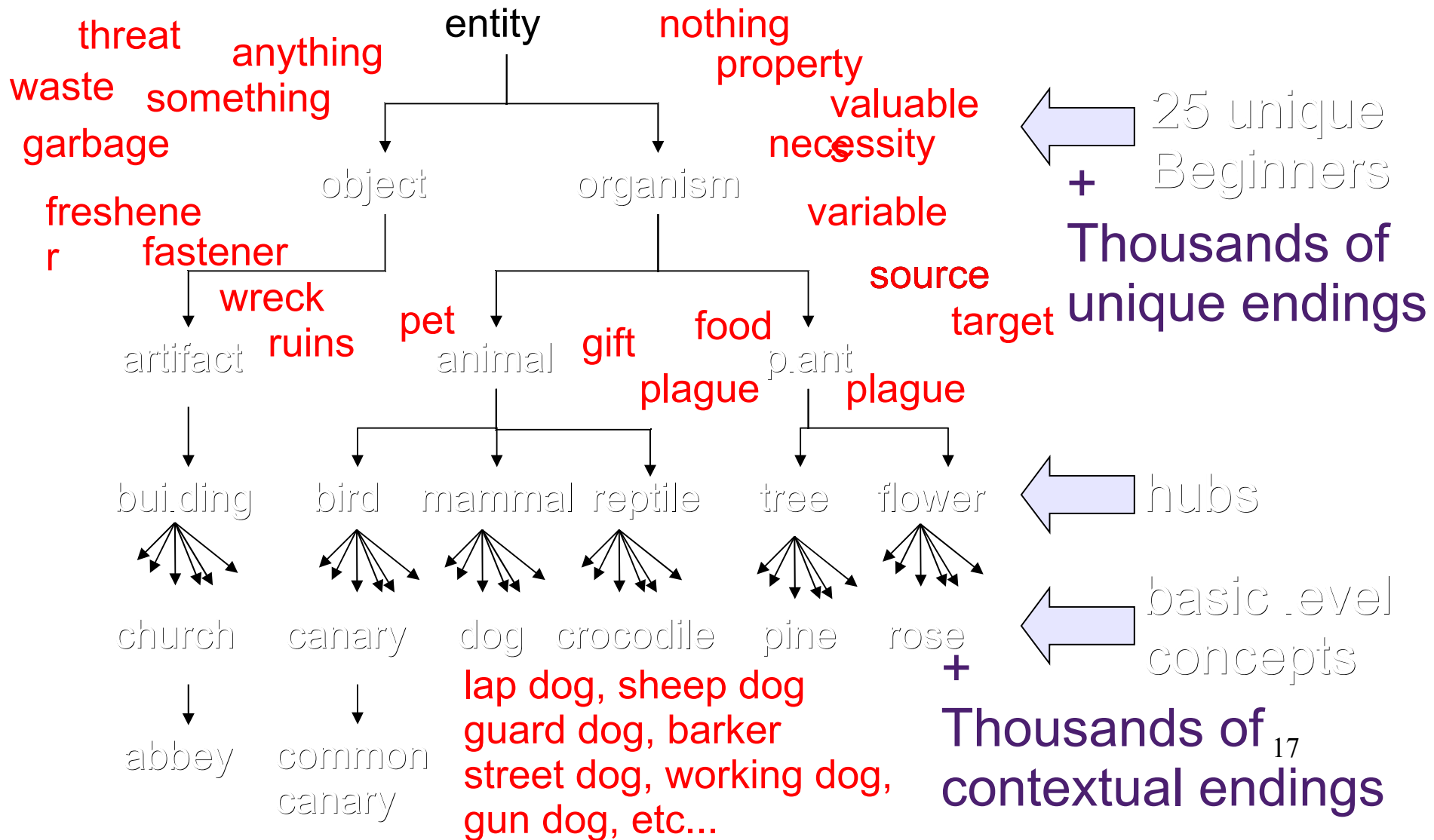
← basic level  
concepts

# Overall structure of wordnets

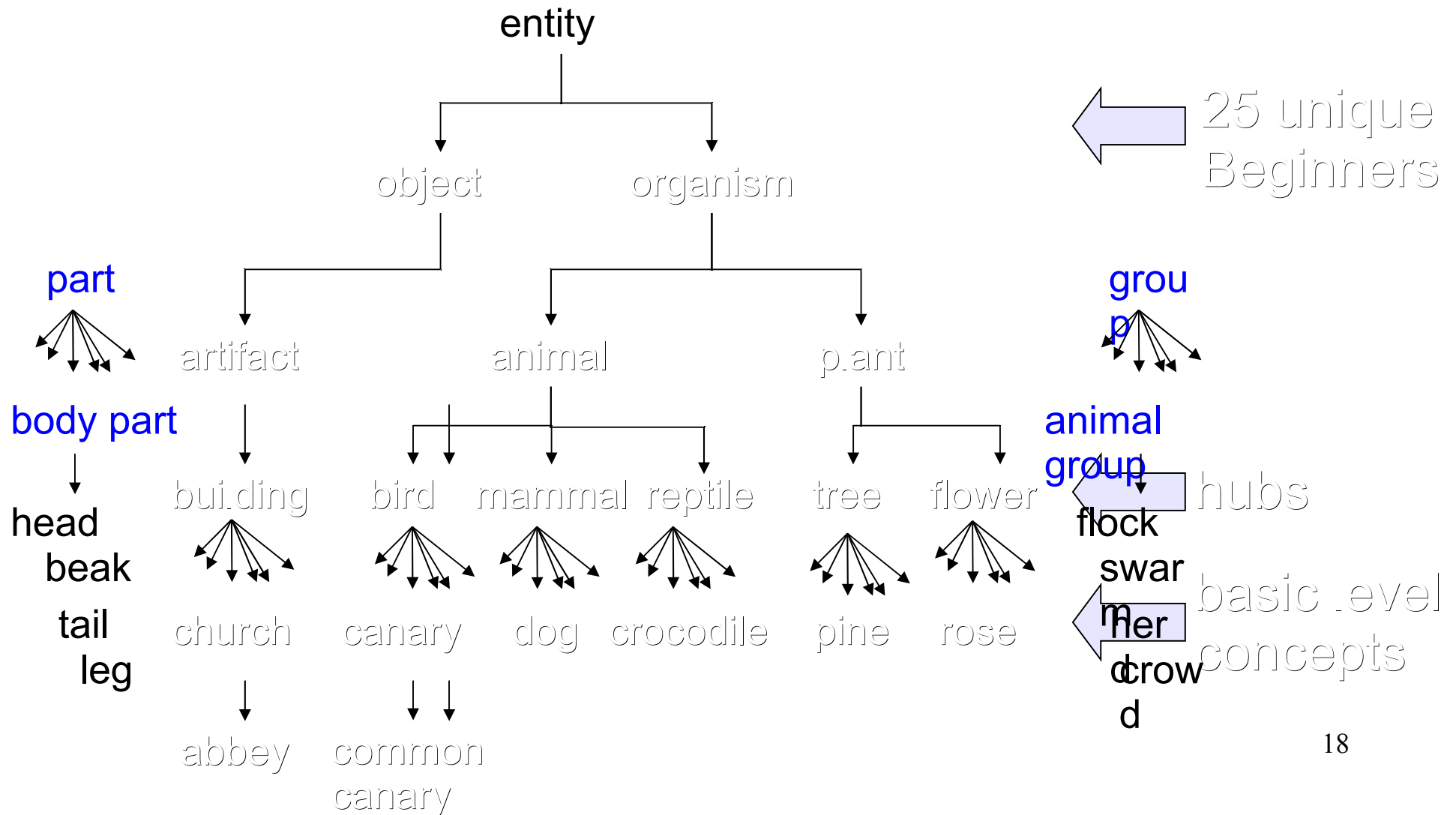




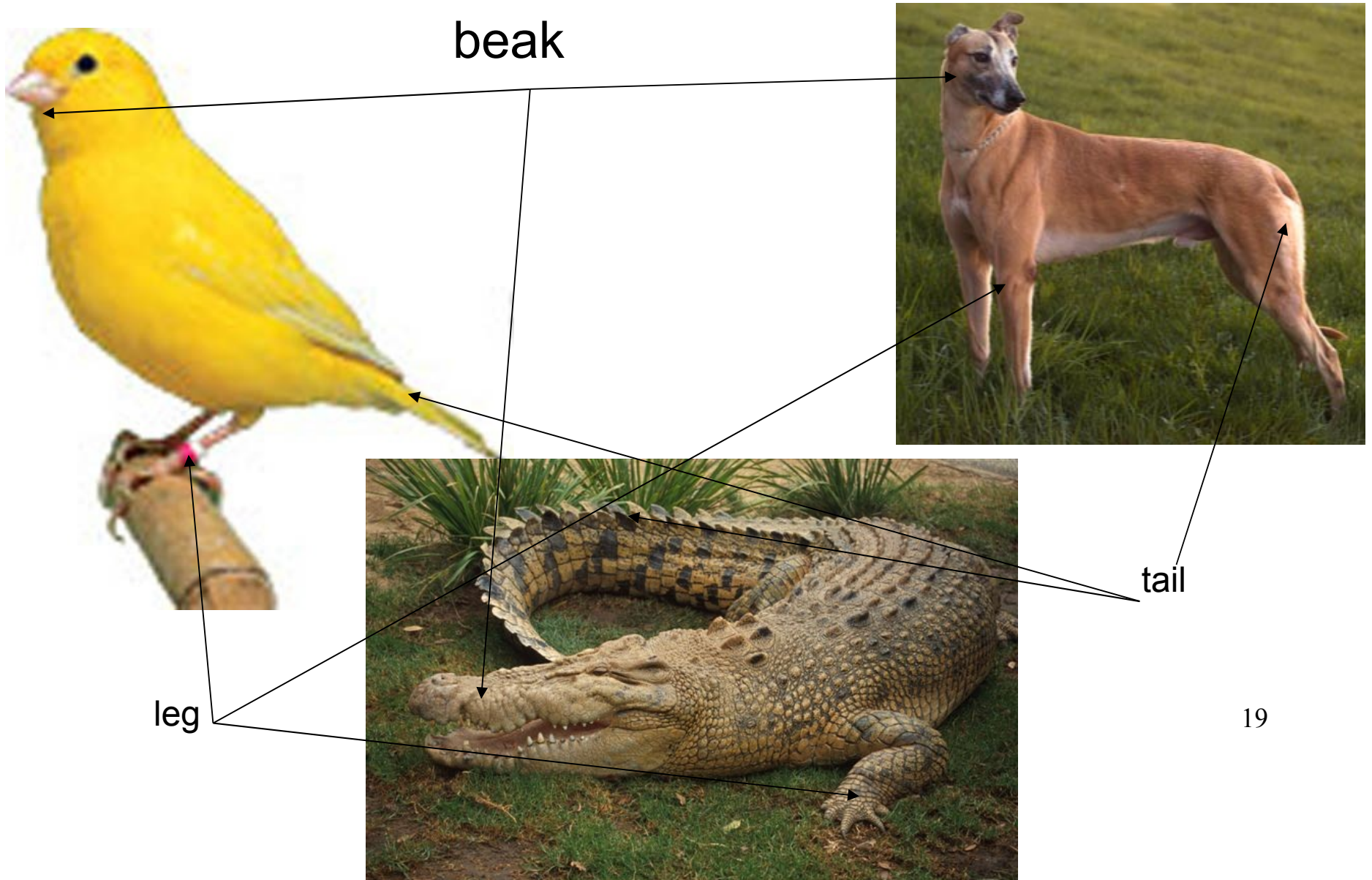
# Overall structure of wordnets



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# Ambiguity of words for parts



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# Why is language minimalistic?

- Language is both grounded in personal experience and social interaction
- Language mediates between knowledge of speaker and addressee and is never fully explicit
- Gricean maxim of quantity:
  - Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange, within a cultural setting.
  - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required for the purpose and the cultural background.
- We can do with less words to talk about many things

# Conclusions

- Vocabularies of language form real-world networks in many ways
- The most frequent and ambiguous words represent hubs in small word structures, which are supposed to be most efficient and robust
- When we communicate, it is more efficient to use a smaller set of symbols whose meaning can be stretched
- Each language is an abstract symbolic structure, heavily influenced by the social and cultural carving and tuning in a language community

# Network properties of vocabularies

- Most frequent words:
  - have most meanings,
  - are co-occurrence hubs,
  - are hubs in semantic networks incorporating ambiguity
- There are many more words than cognitive salient things: *lap dog, barker, street dog vs. poodle, Newfoundland*
- There are many words that can be applied to many different cognitive salient things: *friend, pet, threat, danger, menace, taxable object, purchase*, which can also refer to *dogs*
- Language is inherently vague and ambiguous as a real-world network but why?

# Word networks of co-occurrence

- Study by Ferrer I Cancho & Solé:
- British National Corpus 460K/470K words and  $1.61 \cdot 10^7$   $1.77 \cdot 10^7$  edges based on co-occurrence relations
- Network properties:
  - Average connections: 70/74 links
  - Cluster coefficient: 0.43/0.68, compare 0.00014 random
  - Average min. path length: 2.67/2.63, compare 3.06/3.03 random



# Networks of word meanings

