According to the Language of Thought hypothesis, our minds use symbols that represent things.

Examples of physical symbols that represent things:

Othrographic: Ink spots, by having a certain shape ('dog'), make a symbol referring to dogs.

Vocal: The right sequence of sounds (those in the spoken word 'snow') constitute a symbol referring to snow.

Signed: A certain position of hands and a certain movement make an ASL symbol for 'play'.

Misc. conventions: The flag on a mailbox symbolizes that there is mail in the mailbox.

In the Brain: certain physical states, such as the firing of certain neurons or certain sequences of certain neurons firing, might constitute a symbol for dogs or for snow or for playing.

According to LOT, these symbols can be combined to form more complex symbols 'just like' words can be combined to form sentences.

The complex symbols will have the simpler symbols as its parts.

The formation of complex symbols from simpler symbols will follow certain (syntactic) rules.

The *meaning* of a complex symbol will be a function of the meaning of its simpler parts and the rules.