What follows are some of the arguments found in “Of Words”, by John Locke. This is not intended to be comprehensive. Arguments are listed by section number. The ‘*’ indicates that the premise is implicit in the text.

I.1, 2

P1. People are social

P2. People use language to interact

P3. Language is not just sound, but significant sound

P4. Sounds are made significant by communicating ideas

C. Words stand for ideas

I.3

P1. If all words signified individual things, the number of words would have perplexed their use

P2. The number of words does not perplex their use

C. Not all words signify individual things

II.1

P1. If words were naturally connected as signs to ideas, then all people would have the same language

P2. People do not all have the same language
3. Words are not naturally connected as signs to ideas

*P4. Words are either naturally connected or artificially connected as signs to ideas

C. Words are artificially connected as signs to ideas

II.2

P1. Words are signs, immediately, of ideas

P2. If words were signs, immediately, of anything else (e.g., objects, the ideas of someone else), then they would be both signs of his own ideas and not signs of his own ideas at the same time.

P3. It cannot be the case that words are both signs of one’s own ideas and not signs of one’s own ideas at the same time.

C. Words are not signs, immediately, of anything else.

P1. Words are voluntary signs (i.e., signs imposed by the speaker on ideas)

P2. If words could be imposed as signs by the speaker on “things he knows not”, then they would be signs of nothing (i.e., signs without signification)

P3. Words cannot be signs of nothing.

C. Words cannot be imposed as signs by the speaker on “things he knows not”

II.5

P1. If words are made to “stand for anything but those ideas we have in our own minds”, then we bring “unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification”

*P2. We should not introduce unavoidable obscurity and confusion

C. Words should not be made to stand for anything other than ideas
P1. Assume for the sake of argument that since all things are particulars, words also only signify particulars.

P2. But “It is impossible that every particular thing should have a distinct peculiar name” – i.e., we cannot possibly give a name to every last thing

P3. Even if it were possible, it would be “useless” since have a big heap of words would not facilitate communication

P4. Even if it were feasible for communication, communication would not serve the goal of improving knowledge, which is founded in “general views”

*5. From P2-P4, it is not possible that words only signify particulars

P6. If words do not just signify particulars, then there must be general terms

C. Language contains general terms