

"Unlocking the Mysteries of Language: Exploring Its Origins, Theories of Language, and Evolutionary Approaches"

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Abstract:

The quest to unravel the origins of language has captivated scholars for centuries, yet consensus remains elusive. Researchers draw insights from diverse fields, including the fossil record, archaeology, linguistic diversity, and language acquisition studies. Exploring the connection between language origins and human behaviour fuels ongoing debate, with religious texts offering alternative narratives. Language, a cornerstone of civilization, serves varied functions and manifests in diverse forms: monosyllabic, agglutinative, and inflectional. Its functions encompass information dissemination, expression, and direction, shaping societal interactions across time and space. This abstract provides an overview of the multifaceted approaches and debates surrounding the origin, kinds, and functions of language, setting the stage for further exploration within this dynamic field of study.

Keywords: Language origins, Linguistic diversity, Human behaviour, Religious narratives, Civilization, Language functions, Societal interactions, Multifaceted approaches etc.

Introduction:

Language stands as an essential pillar of human civilization, facilitating the exchange of ideas among like-minded individuals within the framework of their shared understanding. From infancy to the twilight years, humans naturally engage in the process of language acquisition, honing their linguistic skills throughout their lives. Through the use of sounds or gestures, individuals communicate using a rich array of symbols ingrained in human cognition. The diversity of human languages worldwide reflects the complexity and richness of human communication. ¹

Languages are characterized by sets of symbols, each governed by distinct patterns that shape their grammar. These patterns, found in nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs,

prepositions, etc., are organized within inflectional phrases (IP) and follow grammatical syntax to convey complete sentences. Across languages, the arrangement of words in a sentence — encompassing subject, verb, object, complement, adjunct, etc. — reflects the underlying structure of communication.

Human individuals, driven by the need to express various intentions such as requests, promises, questions, orders, thanks, and apologies, possess the inherent ability to communicate within their social circles. While animals also utilize sounds to express emotions, humans stand out for their intellectual capacity.

Language serves as the primary tool for exchanging ideas within society, whether through spoken or written forms. Central to this exchange are three key elements: the message, the sender, and the receiver, with both sender and receiver typically being human individuals. As linguist Crystal aptly describes, language is fundamentally a "vocal system of human communication."² According to Henry Sweet, language embodies the articulation of ideas through the integration of speech sounds into words, which are then assembled into sentences, mirroring the organization of thoughts into ideas. Similarly, American linguists Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager delineate language as a structured system of arbitrary vocal symbols facilitating social cooperation within a group.³

Additionally, A.S. Diamond posits that language serves as a tangible manifestation of the accumulated intellectual progress of our human lineage, acting as a chronicle of our ancestors' daily reflections. Meanwhile, the Standard Dictionary of English Language offers a thorough definition, portraying language as the conduit for conveying emotions and ideas among individuals through spoken communication, with the sounds employed being standardized and validated by communal usage over time.⁴ George A. Muller, another prominent linguist, asserts that language functions as a collection of symbolic agreements, embraced by a community to facilitate the exchange of ideas, convey emotions, foster collaboration, and offer amusement.⁵ In essence, a language comprises sequences of morphemes, allowing individuals to articulate intricate sequences of words to achieve specific objectives within social communication. The vitality of a language lies in its capacity for evolution and expansion, maintaining relevance and effectiveness over time.

Notably, spoken language holds a broader scope compared to its written counterpart, sometimes capturing nuances that evade written records, such as songs passed down through generations. Written language, often regarded as a product of later social developments, serves as a medium of artistic expression and precise communication, particularly by those with literary expertise. While spoken language is accessible to all, the written form tends to be wielded primarily by the educated elite, emphasizing a distinction in usage between different segments of society.⁶

Recognizing language as the cornerstone of human expression, it becomes evident that it is an innate phenomenon indispensable for effective communication. From the earliest stages of life to the final breath, individuals naturally embark on the journey of language acquisition, utilizing sound or gestures as the primary means of expression.

Within their respective social circles, individuals possess an inherent ability to communicate using what are commonly referred to as natural languages. Despite the arbitrary distinctions between language groups, often blurred by cultural exchanges, it is challenging to delineate clear boundaries between them. For instance, various dialects of German exhibit striking similarities to Dutch, yet remain unintelligible to speakers of other German dialects, highlighting the nuanced complexities of linguistic diversity.⁷

Language Origin:

The origins of human language are shrouded in the mists of prehistory, with religious texts offering conjectures on its beginnings that scientists have yet to reach consensus on. Some scholars suggest that human language may have emerged as early as 1.5 million years ago, coinciding with the era of *Homo habilis*, while others propose a later timeline, around 40,000 years ago, aligning with the existence of Cro-Magnon man. However, the lack of conclusive evidence hampers efforts to pinpoint the precise nature and origin of human speech, leaving the matter open to on-going debate and speculation.⁸

Reference to the origin of human language can be found in the teachings of the Holy Qur'ân , which attributes the creation of mankind to the Almighty Allah.⁹ According to the Qur'ân , humanity was bestowed with the power of expression and comprehension, enabling individuals to articulate and understand the relationships between phenomena clearly.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Qur'ân states that all humans are descendants of the first man, Adam (pbuh), and his mate, Eve (Hawwâ), from whom countless generations have emerged.¹¹ The Qur'ân also addresses the diversity among human populations, highlighting how distinct characteristics, languages, and physical appearances have developed over time and across different geographical regions.¹²

As human populations expanded into diverse nations across the world, they inhabited varied climates, leading to the evolution of distinct languages and physical appearances while maintaining their fundamental unity. Through time, ancient languages vanished, giving rise to new linguistic forms as societies adapted to changing environments and evolving thoughts. The biblical narrative in the book of Genesis provides significant insight into the origin of language, with religious adherents finding evidence of divine inspiration in the account of Adam naming the creatures of the earth. This narrative underscores the belief among Christians and Jews in the Old Testament's role in elucidating the creation of language through divine guidance, as highlighted by Ramdan 'Abd al-Tawwâb in his work on the science of language.¹³

Regarding this topic, certain Arab scholars have endorsed a theory rooted in a verse from the Holy Qur'ân . The verse speaks of Adam being taught the names of all things, which were then displayed before the angels. Hazrat Ibn 'Abbas, a respected interpreter of the Qur'ân , has provided an interpretation of this verse suggesting that Adam, the forefather of humanity, was bestowed with knowledge of all things, which subsequent generations acquired in a manner akin to learning the names of animals and objects. Both the Holy Qur'ân and the Bible make reference to the development of human language, underscoring its significance in religious texts and interpretations.¹⁴

When examining the origins of language, insights from divine messages found in both the Biblical accounts and Qur'ân ic verses suggest a common origin for human language, which was initially singular across the entire Earth. This concept aligns with the 'monogenetic' theory of languages, championed by modern scholars like Alfredo Trombetti and Carlo Tagliavani. According to this theory, there existed a single language that eventually diversified into various linguistic families, encompassing primary, secondary, and individual branches. However, Friedrich Muller proposed an alternative perspective known as the 'polygenetic' origin of

language, positing the simultaneous emergence of distinct linguistic families from the outset of human language evolution.¹⁵

Creation of Language:

The emergence of languages in the world remains a subject of contention, with various religious beliefs offering divergent perspectives. While some traditions, like the narrative of the Tower of Babel, suggest a divine intervention resulting in the proliferation of languages, others propose theories such as Arabic being the original language spoken by Adam (pbuh) upon his arrival on Earth.

Certain research studies propose Babylonian as the ancient mother language, positing its use for over 5000 years. This notion finds support in archaeological discoveries, with the oldest known written records dating back to approximately 5500 years ago in Sumerian script, followed by ancient Chinese and Egyptian records from around 3500 years ago.

It is speculated that Sumerian evolved from Babylonian, although both languages faded into obscurity with the decline of their respective civilizations. Languages like Akkadian and Phoenician, once vibrant, are now considered 'dead' due to their absence from contemporary linguistic discourse.

Religious scriptures reinforce the significance of Arabic, attributing its use to Adam and proclaiming it as the root of all languages. This belief underscores Arabic's enduring legacy and symbolic strength as a language with profound historical and cultural significance.¹⁶

Beginning of Human Language:

It is widely acknowledged that humanity traces its lineage back to Adam and Hawwa, who are believed to be the progenitors of all human beings on Earth. According to various sources, they initially resided in the Middle East before their descendants dispersed across the globe, implying that early humans likely spoke a single language.

The Holy Qur'ân states that Allah taught Adam the names of all things,¹⁷ suggesting that he possessed a profound understanding of language, unlike the angels who learned from him.

Furthermore, the Qur'ân emphasizes Adam's eloquence, indicating that linguistic proficiency was inherent in humanity from its inception.¹⁸

While some anthropologists argue that the earliest humans communicated solely through gestures rather than speech, religious narratives assert Adam's linguistic capabilities and his role in imparting knowledge and guidance to his descendants in a clear and articulate manner.

Contemporary anthropologists suggest that the earliest humans lacked coherent beliefs or self-awareness, acquiring language skills gradually from observing birds and animals. Michael Corballis, a notable figure in psychology, explores the evolution of language in his work "The Recursive Mind: Origins of Human Language, Thought, and Civilization." Corballis proposes that early language primarily relied on gestures, with vocal sounds gradually supplementing communication. However, such theories neglect the fundamental role of divine instruction in the origin of language, as recounted in religious texts.

These hypotheses diverge from the reality of Adam's creation, as depicted in religious narratives, where Adam was endowed with comprehensive knowledge by his Creator from the moment of his inception. The prevalence of shared linguistic roots across diverse languages, particularly in ancient tongues like Syriac and Hebrew, underscores the interconnectedness of human languages. Through meticulous analysis, it becomes evident that the multitude of languages and dialects worldwide can be traced back to a common origin—the language of our progenitors, Adam and Eve.¹⁹

Indeed, numerous verses in the Holy Qur'ân and teachings from Prophetic Traditions emphasize the importance of knowledge and literacy. In one such Qur'ânic verse, our Lord, in His infinite wisdom, instructs: "Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clinging substance. Read and your Lord, the Most Merciful. He who taught by the pen." This divine guidance underscores the significance of education and intellectual pursuits, highlighting the role of writing and learning in the human experience.²⁰

Similarly, the creation of humanity includes intricately designed mechanisms for hearing and speech, encompassing the ears, tongue, oral cavity, and vocal cords intricately connected to a finely tuned nervous system. These anatomical features unequivocally refute the assertions of

atheists who claim that humans initially existed in ignorance, disbelief, and silence, only later learning to speak by mimicking animal sounds and fearing natural phenomena.

Despite the clarity of these truths, many atheists and polytheists persist in denying their Creator, attributing everything to an ambiguous concept of "nature" devised to evade acknowledgment of the Creator's role in creation. In contrast, monotheistic belief holds that humans were created with inherent knowledge, a duty to worship, and the ability to speak, think, and possess all the attributes necessary to fulfil their purpose and trust in God.

Language serves as a means of understanding the names of things, a gift bestowed upon Adam (peace be upon him) by divine inspiration. Adam's understanding was comprehensive; he knew each name as God created it, and upon descending to Earth, he further developed this knowledge. As humans continue to evolve and define their surroundings, they derive names from the inspiration embedded within Adam's consciousness by the Almighty. The presentation of "names" to the angels, who could not recognize them, underscores the absolute power of God in inspiring Adam with knowledge and understanding.²¹

Before the era of archaeological discoveries, Jewish tradition propagated the belief that Hebrew was the original language spoken by Adam and his descendants, a notion that gained traction in Europe during the Middle Ages.²²

According to Christian scripture, the descendants of Adam and Hawwa faced divine retribution for their transgressions and were subsequently wiped out by a catastrophic flood, sparing only Noah and his followers. From Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—the lineage of humanity continued, with all people today being traced back to these patriarchs.²³

The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth are believed to have populated various regions, as documented in historical texts such as "*al-bidâya wa al-nihâya*." Shem's descendants are said to include the Arabs, Persians, and Romans, while Japheth's lineage is linked to the Turks, Slavs, and other groups. Ham's offspring are associated with the Copts, Sudanese, and Berbers, among others.²⁴

Scholars' Views on Language Origin:

Scholars and researchers offer differing perspectives on the origin of language, with some asserting that language was created alongside humanity, while others contend that it evolved gradually over time during various stages of human development. Even renowned linguists like Deutscher and Macourtier acknowledge that the origins of language remain shrouded in mystery, persisting for thousands of years to the present day.

One prevailing theory posits that modern languages diverged from a single "mother tongue" spoken by humans approximately 100,000 years ago, while another hypothesis suggests that languages today stem from several original languages dating back at least 6,000 years. However, linguists face a significant challenge: unlike biologists, they lack fossil evidence to illuminate past events, relying instead on estimates derived from mathematical models.

Researcher Ibtiḥāl al-ʿAbsī explores the "Bo-Wu" theory, which proposes that language originated from the unspoken sounds of animals. Michael Corbalis further elaborates on this concept in his book "On the Genesis of Language," suggesting that humans, observing birds and their behaviours, began to emulate their sounds and gestures. Over time, these imitations evolved into a distinct form of communication unique to humans, separate from that of birds.²⁵

Language Theory:

Apart from the Qurʾānic and Biblical narratives, various modern theories attempt to explain the origins of language. Among these, four primary theories stand out.

Onomatopoeia theory suggests that language originated from the formation of words that imitated natural sounds. For example, a person mimicking a dog's bark might create a word representing that sound. While this theory seems plausible, some linguists question its chronology. They argue that animals themselves produce a variety of sounds, rendering human imitation unnecessary. However, proponents like Jespersen argue that humans also mimic sound-like words from fellow humans. Nevertheless, the core idea remains: sounds produced by creatures can be used to characterize them.²⁶ According to Philologist Ibn Jinnī, various natural sounds, from the rustling of leaves to the crowing of a rooster, contributed to the creation of language.²⁷ Despite its prominence, some Western scholars, like Harder, initially opposed this

theory, as documented in his 1772 book "Abhandlungen über den Ursprung der Sprache." Despite debate, the Onomatopoeic theory remains influential in understanding the origins of language.²⁸

Theory of Dingdong:

One of the well-known theories concerning the origins of language revolves around the concept of sound symbolism. Max Muller, a renowned linguist, initially embraced this theory but later diverged from it. This theory underscores the relationship between sound and human perception, highlighting a harmonious resonance in nature's laws. Words like "dazzle" and "zigzag" exemplify this harmony, where the sound of the word mirrors its meaning. Additionally, reduplications, such as "big man," serve to emphasize this connection between sound and sense.²⁹ R.A. al-Tawwâb's interpretation of this theory, known as the "Natural Disposition / Ding-dong Theory," emphasizes the innate human instinct to craft words that express their intentions effectively. According to this view, humans possess an inherent capacity to articulate their thoughts through words, demonstrating a seamless alignment between sound and meaning.³⁰

Theory of Pooh-pooh:

This theory sheds light on the origins of language and stands as one of the prominent hypotheses in language evolution. According to this perspective, language emerged through the vocalization of cries, interjections, and utterances. However, A.S. Diamond contends that this theory lacks utility, as language evolves beyond mere interjections. While cries and interjections persist in human communication, their significance primarily revolves around emotional expression, such as fear, pain, joy, and surprise. Moreover, each phonetic element in language carries intellectual significance, transcending the emotive function of interjections. Examples like 'oh,' 'bah,' 'fie,' and 'pshaw' serve as exclamatory expressions but do not encompass the entirety of linguistic development. Criticisms of this theory highlight its oversimplification and failure to account for the complexity and intellectual depth inherent in language evolution.³¹

Theory of Gesture:

This theory holds significant sway within the realm of linguistic inquiry, elucidating the foundational elements of language. Pioneered by eminent linguists like Wilhelm Wundt and Sir

Richard Paget, this theory posits that early human communication relied heavily on hand gestures and oral articulation. Wundt highlights the primacy of hand gestures in communication, while Paget emphasizes the role of mouth gestures in articulation. While gestures themselves may not constitute words or sentences, they exert considerable influence over linguistic expression, particularly evident in dramatic literature and spoken language. This theory also holds practical value for individuals with sensory impairments, such as the deaf and blind, who rely on gestures or motions for communication. Moreover, the principle of gesture theory extends to the articulation of specific words, as observed in the nuanced movements of the lips during pronunciation. For instance, the inward movement of the lips in pronouncing 'I' and 'me' suggests self-reference, whereas the outward movement in 'you' and 'thou' indicates addressing another individual. Similarly, the contrasting lip movements in 'here' and 'there' convey spatial distinctions.³

In addition to the previously mentioned theories on the origin of language, several other perspectives have emerged throughout history:

Ludwig Noire, a German philosopher, proposed the "Yo-he-ho theory," suggesting that speech originated from joint or communal work activities. According to this theory, sounds emitted during physical exertion could become associated with specific tasks, eventually evolving into symbolic representations, such as the words 'heave' and 'haul'.³³

Another theory surfaced in the early days of modern linguistics, presented in Alexander Murray's posthumously published work, "The History of the European Languages" (1823). Murray proposed that nine fundamental words formed the basis of language, initially communicated through gestures and transmitted vocally as variable tunes.

Danish linguist Otto Jespersen introduced the idea of a primitive language consisting of lengthy words and complex sounds, resembling chants rather than spoken language. While some found this theory peculiar, Jespersen speculated that language may have originated from courtship rituals, drawing inspiration from Charles Darwin's "The Descent of Man."³⁴

Lastly, naturalists have posited that language is a spontaneous form of human communication, contrary to the detailed accounts found in religious scriptures. While each theory offers insights into the origins of language, none provide comprehensive explanations of

grammar or syntax, highlighting the complexity and obscurity of this subject. Despite their limitations, these theories contribute to our understanding of linguistic evolution, urging scholars to delve deeper into the study of language origins.³⁵

Discussion:

Language, an essential pillar of human civilization, facilitates idea exchange through symbols ingrained in cognition. Governed by distinct patterns, languages convey intentions and emotions, enabling social cooperation. Language, as described by linguists Crystal, Sweet, Bloch, and Trager, embodies structured vocal systems fostering collaboration. A.S. Diamond views it as intellectual progress, while Muller sees it as symbolic agreements. Its origins, shrouded in prehistory, evoke religious and scholarly speculation. The Qur'ân and biblical narratives attribute language to divine inspiration, with Arab scholars endorsing monogenetic theories. Some propose Babylonian as the mother language, while others emphasize Arabic's significance. Language's evolution mirrors human societal shifts, as seen in the rise and fall of ancient tongues like Sumerian and Phoenician. Ultimately, language's innate nature underscores its role in human expression and societal cohesion, from infancy to antiquity.

Humanity traces its lineage to Adam and Hawwa, believed to be the first humans, likely speaking a single language. The Qur'ân attributes linguistic knowledge to Adam, distinct from angels, emphasizing his eloquence. While some anthropologists propose gradual language evolution, religious narratives assert divine instruction. Shared linguistic roots across languages support this interconnectedness. The Qur'ân emphasizes literacy and knowledge, highlighting education's importance. Anatomical features refute atheist claims of gradual language acquisition. Monotheistic beliefs affirm inherent human knowledge and speech. Language serves to understand creation's names, bestowed upon Adam by divine inspiration. Hebrew was traditionally believed to be Adam's language. Christian scripture mentions Noah's lineage populating diverse regions. Shem's descendants include Arabs, Persians, and Romans; Japheth's, Turks and Slavs; Ham's, Copts and Berbers. These narratives underscore language's divine origin and humanity's shared ancestry.

Scholars offer varied views on language origin, some suggesting it was created alongside humanity, others proposing gradual evolution. Linguists lack fossil evidence, relying on

mathematical models for estimates. The "Bo-Wu" theory explores language's animal origins. Four primary language origin theories emerge: Onomatopoeia, Dingdong, Pooh-pooh, and Gesture. Onomatopoeia theory links words to natural sounds, while Dingdong theory highlights sound symbolism. Pooh-pooh theory emphasizes vocalizations' role, and Gesture theory underscores hand and mouth gestures' significance. Other historical theories include Ludwig Noire's "Yo-he-ho," Otto Jespersen's primitive language theory, and Alexander Murray's fundamental word theory. Despite insights, none fully explain grammar or syntax, reflecting language origin's complexity. These theories contribute to understanding linguistic evolution, prompting further inquiry.

Conclusion:

In every society, communication through language is indispensable for expressing human thoughts. Its evolution, whether verbal, written, or gestural, is crucial for individual interaction. Consequently, there is a quest to understand its origins, types, functions, and methodologies. Over time, words may undergo subtle or substantial changes in meaning, while structures are not static but dynamic, evolving over time. Hence, linguistic research focuses on tracing its historical stages, encompassing aspects such as phonetics, morphology, and semantics. Like other societal phenomena, language is subject to evolution, necessitating consideration of developmental concepts in linguistic studies. Furthermore, it adheres to general laws, being a component of social life that undergoes continual change and development. Therefore, linguistic research must account for these laws to comprehend language's dynamic nature fully.

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