

# The Study of Language – Chapter 1: The Origins of Language

- Course: Introduction to Linguistics
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# Introduction

- Focus: How language began
- No definitive answer – only hypotheses
- Interest spans linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy

# The Divine Source Theory

- Belief: Language was given by a divine source
- Examples:
  - -Biblical story: Adam naming all creatures
  - -Ancient Egyptian and Hindu beliefs
- Criticism: Lacks empirical evidence

# The Natural Sound Source

- Language originated from natural sounds
- Two sub-theories:
  - -Bow-wow theory: Imitation of natural sounds (e.g., animal cries)
  - -Pooh-pooh theory: Instinctive emotional cries (pain, joy, etc).
- Criticism: Limited scope of expressive ability

# The Social Interaction Source

- Yo-he-ho theory: Language developed through communal labor (e.g., chants)
- Emphasis on language as a tool for social coordination
- Strength: Explains interactional function of language

# The Physical Adaptation Source

- Focuses on human physiology
- Unique features:
  - -Upright posture
  - -Reshaped vocal tract
  - -Fine motor control of tongue and lips
- Implication: Speech became physically possible

# The Tool-Making Source

- Language and tool-making evolved together
- Both require:
  - -Sequential planning
  - -Motor control
- Suggests overlapping areas in the brain

# The Genetic Source

- Humans are genetically predisposed to acquire language
- Innateness hypothesis: Language ability is hard-wired
- Supported by:
  - -Universal Grammar (Noam Chomsky)
  - -Language acquisition in children



# Summary

- Multiple theories, no conclusive answer
- Language likely emerged from a combination of:
  - -Physical capacity
  - -Cognitive development
  - -Social necessity

# Discussion Questions

- .1 Which origin theory do you find most convincing? Why?
- .2 How might modern technology (e.g., brain imaging) help study language origins?
- .3 Can animal communication systems evolve into human language?