



LIFE·PAC®

Language Arts

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Alpha Omega Publications®

LANGUAGE ARTS 1204
LANGUAGE: GOD'S GIFT TO MAN

CONTENTS

I. ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE	2
Theories of the Origin of Language	2
Biblical Account of Language Origin	4
Origin of Koiné Greek	6
II. GRAMMAR	9
Purpose of Studying Grammar	9
Types of Grammar	10
III. SEMANTICS	22
Definition of Semantics	22
Development of Semantics	23
Study of Meaning	24
GLOSSARY	33

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LANGUAGE: GOD'S GIFT TO MAN

Language records truth, preserves ancient wisdom, and spreads ideas. Language can be used to teach or to persuade; it also can be used to confuse or to deceive. The sounds and symbols that make up human speech give man greater control over his life than any animal possesses.

The purpose of this LIFE PAC® is to help you to improve your understanding of language. You will study about the nature and the origin of language. You will learn to distinguish between the *grammar* of a language and those systems of analysis called *grammars* that attempt to describe the workings of a language or to prescribe rules for its use. You will learn about the various types of grammars and how to use them. Finally, you will learn about *semantics*, the study of word meanings.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives will tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFE PAC.

When you have completed this LIFE PAC, you should be able to:

1. Cite three theories of the origin of language.
2. Give the Biblical account of the first uses of speech.
3. Discuss the historical development of Koiné Greek.
4. Evaluate Noah Webster's essay "Origin of Language."
5. State the purpose of a grammar.
6. List three characteristics of structural grammar.
7. List and explain three rules of transformational grammar.
8. Cite similarities and differences between traditional grammar and the newer grammars.
9. Explain the reasons why transformational grammar and structural linguistics were developed.
10. Define semantics.
11. Explain the different areas of semantics.
12. Trace the development of semantics.
13. Explain the elements that contribute to the study of meaning.

Survey the LIFE PAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

For thousands of years, people have wondered about the origin of language. Most people in ancient times believed language to be a gift from God or from the gods. Others, for example, the Greek philosophers, thought that speech was a human invention, wholly arbitrary and devised for social convenience.

Many modern thinkers believe that these points of view can be reconciled: that language is, indeed, a gift from God, but that it has changed and developed as man has increased his learning and as his culture has become more complex.

In this section you will study the different theories of language origin. You will also learn about the origin and development of the language of the New Testament, Koiné Greek.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Cite three theories of the origin of language.
2. Give the Biblical account of the first uses of speech.
3. Discuss the historical development of Koiné Greek.
4. Evaluate Noah Webster's essay "Origin of Language."

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

angular gyrus

limbic system

cognitive

lingua franca

lateralization

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in boldface print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

The Greek historian Herodotus told a story that illustrates the fairly common ancient idea of the origin of language. According to the tale, King Psammetichos of Egypt wished to settle an argument over whether the Egyptians or the Phrygians were the older race. Believing that a baby reared without exposure to language would speak the original language of man, he commanded that two children be raised completely isolated from speech. One day, one of the children uttered the sound *bekos*. Because this word meant *bread* in the Phrygian language, the king decided that Phrygian was older than Egyptian.

Theories of the origin of speech thread through the legends of people of many tribes and nations mingled with theories of the origin of their own languages.

Evolutionary theories. A century ago, at about the time that Darwin published his controversial book, *The Origin of Species*, the evolutionary theory of language development became popular. Although some Christians believe that this theory of language development is unbiblical, others believe that it neither denies God nor contradicts the Bible.

The theory of evolution states that man and apes are descended from a common ancestor, possibly an ape-like, tree-dwelling creature. Although the apes developed primitive means of communication and a simple society, only man developed language, the key to complex reasoning and to civilization.

The single fact that a man's brain is larger than an ape's brain is not sufficient to explain why speech is a uniquely human trait. Dwarfed human beings talk as well as persons of normal size, although the ratio of their brain weight to their body weight is approximately the same as that of chimpanzees.

Unlike the brains of apes, man's brain is organized so that specific cognitive skills and motor skills are located on a particular side of the brain. If a person is right-handed, the left half of his brain controls these skills, and the right frontal lobe is his conscious fore-brain. This division of the brain into independent halves is called **lateralization**.

Manual dexterity is somehow connected with speech. Lateralization seems to be at least partially responsible for the ability to talk. The areas most vital in the use of language are located in the left hemisphere of the brain. However, when children have been brain damaged in the left hemisphere, the right hemisphere has taken over the neurological function of speech. As Psalm 139:14 says, man is fearfully and wonderfully made.

Another way in which the brain of man differs from that of apes is the **angular gyrus**, an area of the brain through which run nerves connecting visual centers, speech centers, and the area of fine motor control. Apes, as far as man can determine, do not have this special equipment

Many evolutionists feel that man's **limbic system** is one of the reasons that man talks and the apes do not. The limbic system is an inner part of the brain and brain stem which (in evolutionary terms) is older than the cerebral cortex and which controls basic motivation, emotions, and other more "primitive" mental functions. Evolutionists claim that the limbic system's activity explains the human ability to form words independently of emotional needs.

Certain physiological patterns that are not found in the ape also occur in man. Some of these patterns make possible several abilities: the articulation of sounds that can be heard and understood, the transmission and reception of messages, the production of understandable sounds that have an agreed upon meaning, the projection of unique thought, the addition and deletion of words to change meaning, and many others.

 **Answer these questions.**

1.1 What trait of man is not shared by animals? _____

1.2 How did King Psammetichos of Egypt decide which language, Egyptian or Phrygian, was the older? _____

1.3 What is *lateralization*? _____

1.4 If you are right-handed, which side of the brain controls your cognitive and motor skills?

1.5 What ability is most vitally controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain?

1.6 What is the *angular gyrus*? _____

Among the theories of language origin suggested by evolutionists in the nineteenth century were the "bow wow" theory, the "pooh-pooh" theory, and the "yo-he-ho" theory. The first theory assumes that the first words were formed in imitation of animal cries and other natural sounds. The "pooh-pooh" theory supposes that the first words were interjections or exclamations of emotion that later became associated with the object or situation that caused the outcry. The "yo-he-ho" theory traces the origin of speech to rhythmic chants of

men or women working in unison, or perhaps to the gestures and singsong accompaniments of children's play.

Although these three theories combined may account for the beginnings of vocabulary development in primitive languages, they do not account for complex grammatical structures or for the patterns of linguistic change. More modern linguists believe that in the earliest stages of language development, sounds were strung together with no clear-cut distinction between sounds and words. The vocabulary probably consisted of words for emotions and for specific things, such as a particular tree or landmark, as well as words that fit certain general categories, such as *man* or *stone*. Such a view is not inconsistent with the Biblical account of Adam's naming the animals.

Myths and legends. Whereas the theory of biological evolution has been in existence for about one hundred twenty-five years, legends of Indian tribes have been told for several thousand years. The Peruvian Indians, for example, believe in the supreme god and creator of the Incas, named Veracocha. According to legend, the first people on earth were giants, who were destroyed by a flood. Veracocha then created new and better men. For thousands of years he wandered across Peru establishing social and moral order, teaching people agriculture and other useful arts, and disseminating language and songs.

Just as the Indians and members of many other cultures, the Scandinavians of Viking times believed language to be a gift of the gods. According to Norwegian legends, the gods Odin, Hoener, and Loder were walking together on the shores of the sea by the shining city of Asgard (heaven). They came upon an ash and an elm, two beautiful trees, straight and tall and symmetrical, crowned with luxuriant foliage. As Odin stopped and looked for a long time at the trees, a new thought formed within him. Finally he spoke. "Out of these trees let us make man to fill the earth and make it fruitful; he shall be our child, and we will care for him." The other gods agreed, and out of the ash and the elm were made a man and a woman. The two were named Ash and Embla, the Norse names for the trees. The gods, who were able to communicate using words, gave to their new creations the godlike gift of speech.



Answer these questions.

1.7 Who was Veracocha? _____

1.8 According to Norse legend, what was the origin of man and what was the origin of language?
a. _____

b. _____

BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF LANGUAGE ORIGIN

From the beginning of time, the Bible says, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit communicated with one another. Whether They spoke aloud or in thought, or whether They used words at all, is impossible to say. However, when God wanted to communicate with the beings He created, He used words.

Biblical passages from both the Old Testament and the New Testament tell of angels speaking; and, in the garden of Eden, even the serpent spoke. In order for Adam to com-