



# LANGUAGE ARTS

STUDENT BOOK

▶ **12th Grade** | Unit 4

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# LANGUAGE ARTS 1204

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Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759**

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# The Gift of Language

## Introduction

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 LIFEPAAC® 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 tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAAC®. When you have finished this LIFEPAAC, you will 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.



# 1. 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**  
**cognitive**

**lateralization**  
**limbic system**

**lingua franca**

**Note:** All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are not sure 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.

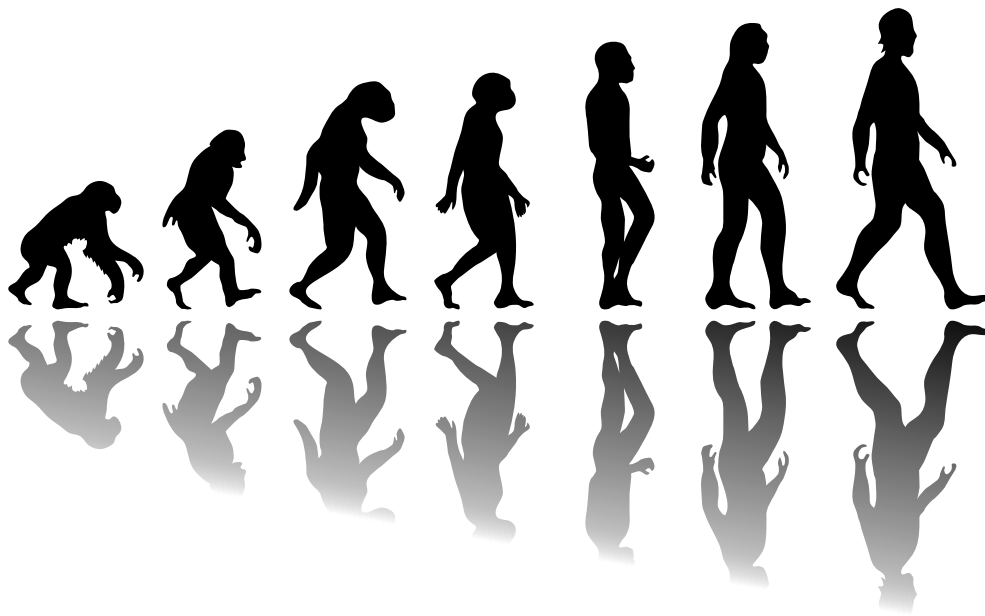
Unlike the brains of apes, man's brain is organized so that specific cognitive skills and motor skills are located on a particular side of the brain. If a person is right-handed, the left half of his brain controls these skills, and the right frontal lobe is his conscious forebrain. This division of 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 sing-song 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 sixty 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 Veracocho. According to legend, the first people on earth were giants, who were destroyed by a flood. Veracocho 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 Veracochoa? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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 communicate with God, he was given the gift of speech and the power to invent words, which was demonstrated when he named the animals. When Eve was created, she, too, could speak. Language was necessary so that Adam and Eve could understand God's commands to them and could respond to those commands and so that they could exchange information and ideas with one another.

The Biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve does not state directly that speech was a gift from God. Nevertheless, had speech not been a divine gift, Adam could never have spoken to God nor understood God's words to him. Adam could not, without aid, have invented a language. One reaction to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve was expressed by Noah Webster in the introduction to his 1828 dictionary:

... If we admit what is the literal and obvious interpretation of this narrative [the Genesis account of Adam and Eve and God], that vocal sounds or words were used in these communications between God and the progenitors of the human race, it results that Adam was not only endowed with intellect for understanding his Maker, or the signification of words, but was furnished both with the faculty of speech, and with speech itself, of the knowledge and use of words, as signs of ideas, and this before the formation of

the woman. Hence we may infer that language was bestowed on Adam, in the same manner as all his other faculties and knowledge, by supernatural power; or in other words, was of divine origin; for supposing Adam to have had all the intellectual powers of any adult individual of the species, who has since lived, we cannot admit as probable, or even possible, that he should have invented and constructed even a barren language, as soon as he was created, without supernatural aid. It may even be doubted, whether without such aid, men would ever have learnt the use of the organs of speech, so far as to form a language. At any rate, the invention of words, and the construction of language must have been a slow process, and must have required a much longer time, than that which passed between the creation of Adam and of Eve. It is therefore *probable* that language as well as the faculty

of speech, was the *immediate gift of God*. We are not however to suppose the language of our first parents in paradise to have been copious, like most modern languages; or the identical language they used, to be now in existence. Many of the primitive radical words may and probably do exist in various languages; but observation teaches that languages must improve and undergo great changes as knowledge increases, and be subject to continual alterations, from other causes incident to men in society.

Mr. Webster continued his essay with several interesting observations. Hebrew could not have been one of the oldest languages because the nation that sprang from Abraham was a latecomer: Syria and Egypt were well-populated countries before Abraham's birth. According to Webster, the language of Sodom and Gomorrah must have been older than that of the Hebrews.

Answer true or false.

- 1.9 \_\_\_\_\_ The Genesis account directly states that language is a gift from God.
- 1.10 \_\_\_\_\_ According to Webster's essay, Adam took the knowledge that God had given him and used it to invent a language.
- 1.11 \_\_\_\_\_ Webster believed that the language spoken by Adam was Hebrew.
- 1.12 \_\_\_\_\_ The Egyptian and Syrian languages are older than Hebrew.

## ORIGIN OF KOINÉ GREEK

Although opinions differ on the origin of spoken language, the origin of many individual languages can be traced. English, for example, developed from a Germanic language, which in turn developed from Indo-European. The history of Koiné Greek, the language of the New Testament, can also be traced.

Four hundred years before Christ, the Greeks of Athens, Sparta, and Thebes were fighting among themselves, each desiring to rule the entire Greek peninsula. The language of Athens was *Attic* Greek, understood throughout Greece and considered by many scholars to be the most versatile and expressive language that ever existed. The inhabitants of Thebes spoke the Boeotian dialect, *Achaean*; and the Spartans spoke West Greek, or *Doric*.



| Alexander the Great



**Alpha Omega**  
PUBLICATIONS

804 N. 2nd Ave. E.  
Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759

800-622-3070  
[www.aop.com](http://www.aop.com)

LAN1204 – Sept '17 Printing

ISBN 978-1-58095-354-2



9 781580 953542