

# Language's Origins

## How Languages Arose



### 'Bow-wow theory'

*language arose from onomatopoeia*  
Making noises to represent elements in the environment: animals, rain, expulsive gas, etc...



### 'Pooh-pooh theory'

*language arose from spontaneous emotional noises*  
Sighs, moans, cries, ejections of surprise, fear, delight, etc...



### 'Yo-he-ho theory'

*language arose in muscular and rhythmic efforts accompanying group work*  
Gathering, distributing, distance-pursuit of prey, etc...



## Lexical Theories



**'Bow-wow theory'**



**'Pooh-pooh theory'**



**'Yo-he-ho theory'**

- Words are not the central aspect that distinguishes human talk
- It's the combinatorics (the ability to group words together)
- Not mutually exclusive
- Speech is very rhythmic
- Only 'Yo-he-ho' theory includes rhythm, sequence, structure.

Dog: colematt/iStock/Thinkstock; Baby: Bullet\_Chained/iStock/Thinkstock; Caveman: hchjll/iStock/Thinkstock

## Neuron-Packing 'Theory'



**Noam Chomsky**

**Theory:** language is innate

- Neural density, big-bang theory
- Non-lexical
- Non-social

- Modern linguist
- Mostly responsible for the centrality of syntax

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## Throwing Madonna Theory



**William Calvin**  
Neural biologist

**Theory:** language developed from women

- Women nurse predominantly on the left side
- Language is left dominant
- Motor/linguistic
- Sequencing
- Non-lexical
- Piggy-backing theory
  - Language arose parasitically on some other process

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## Yadda-yadda-yadda theory

“Verbal grooming” or “language as gossip” theory



**Robin Dunbar**

**Theory:** language is verbal grooming

- Human tribes got too big, social bonds too intricate, to manage them physically
- Social theory
- Non-lexical

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