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| **1** | You are swimming in the ocean (under water). You see a greyish male octopus. Its body suddenly becomes striped and he swims above you. Should you be worried? |
| The fact that he became striped could mean that he thinks you are a female octopus...  Yes. I included this question here as a joke : p |

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| **2** | What point is Pinker trying to make by making you read the octopus, stain removal and 'All My Children' excerpts? |
| That with the ability to make sounds with our mouths and write symbols on paper (etc), that is with the ability to use language we can ‘reliably cause precise new combinations of ideas to arise in each other’s minds’ even across time and space and with no acquaintance between the utterer or writer (etc) and the ‘listener’ or reader(etc). |

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| **3** | What is Cognitive Science? |
| It is a science that emerged some 60 years ago (Pinker says 35 but the book is from 1994) and which ‘uses tools from psychology, computer science, linguistics, philosophy, and neurobiology to explain the workings of human intelligence’.  NOTE: Linguistics can conceived as a branch cognitive science, although it is much older than cognitive science. It is one of the branches that has seen the most advances. |

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| **4** | If language is not a cultural invention, what is it? How is it similar to web-spinning? |
| Pinker describes it as an instinct. Alternative formulations of the same idea use terms such as: psychological faculty, mental organ, a neural system, computational module.  What he means is that:  *Language is a complex, specialized skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process*  *information or behave intelligently.*  This makes it similar to web-spinning which is a complex specialized skill which develops in the spider (most of them) without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic etc  Also important to note concerning this point is:  *Thinking of language as an instinct inverts the popular wisdom, especially as it has been passed down in the canon of the humanities and social sciences. Language is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture.* |

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| **5** | Why is it that looking at language as a biological adaptation might give you new respect for people whose intelligence didn't impress you before? |
| The ability to use language involves very sophisticated knowledge, for example, about it’s phonological system, its grammatical system etc. And all of this sophisticated knowledge is tacitly mastered by all normally functioning human beings, that includes those whose intelligence does not impress you and also includes many who have cognitive impairments in other types of mental activities (example people with Down Syndrome can form and understand grammatical sentences just like people not affected by that condition). |

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| **6** | Who first described language as a kind of instinct? What moved him into doing it? How is language similar to/different from brewing/baking/writing? |
| Charles Darwin in his book of 1871, *The Descent of Man.*  What moved him was the observation that language was not and the languages we use (Portuguese, English, Japanese, Tupi...) were not invented and also that every child has the tendency to speak. That makes it different from cultural activities such as brewing/baking/writing which we don’t learn or do naturally, someone must teach us and that had to be invented. In that sense, it is an instinct.  On the other hand, to learn a language the child must be immersed in the community that uses it. Hence, in a sense, the community has a role in the acquisition too. In that sense it is like brewing or baking. |

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| **7** | If language is an instinct, how come we use it creatively and not like zombies/robots etc? |
| Pinker provides an argument by William James which says that we have the instincts that animals do and others and *Our flexible intelligence comes from the interplay of*  *many instincts competing* |

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| **8** | Why might it not be so interesting to always answer 'Of course we smile, of course our heart palpitates at the sight of a crowd, of course the presence of our respective crushes turn our wits upside down' to the questions: why do we smile? why is it different talking to a crowd and talking to an individual? why does one get nervous when in the presence of a person one has romantic interest for? How is that relevant to the study of language and the objective of the book? |
| In everyday life smiling, heart palpitations at the sight of a crowd, being nervous when your crush walks in the room etc are common things that we do not think about. But if we want to understand human behaviour we should *make the natural seem strange* and start asking why.  Just because smiling seems natural to you does not mean that there is nothing there to be understood. It is a kind of behavior of certain species of creatures (*homo sapiens sapiens)* just like sitting on eggs is a beahvior of chickens. |

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| **9** | The two fundamental facts about language that Chomsky called attention to. |
| *First, virtually every sentence that a person utters or understands is a brand-new combination of words, appearing for the first time in the history of the universe. Therefore a language cannot be a repertoire of responses; the brain must contain a recipe or program that can build an unlimited set of sentences out of a finite list of words.*  *The second fundamental fact is that children develop these complex grammars rapidly and without formal instruction and grow up to give consistent interpretations to novel sentence constructions that they have never before encountered.* |

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| **10** | Chomsky contraposes the study of physical and mental capacities throughout history and proposes something else for language (which is, of course a mental capacity). Summarise his view such that you could tell it to your grandma informatively and such that she understands it - I am assuming she is not a linguist ;) - but without boring her. |
| Language usually been studied as a cultural artifact such as baking or brewing that is learned from experience. But it can be thought of as an instinct: every child has the tendency to speak, independent of its experience and children acquire pretty much the same language despite their experiences being very different. So language is like an instinct. And it can and should be studied using the methods of science (empirical investigation) that are used to study animal behaviour, for example. |