

READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 27-40**, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

The Pirahã people of Brazil

The Pirahã language has stirred up debate among experts

The Pirahã tribe live deep in Brazil's Amazon forest, and their language is hotly debated by linguists. Since 1977, the ethnologist Daniel Everett has spent a total of seven years living with the Pirahã and has committed his career to studying their puzzling speech. Indeed, he was uncertain for so long about what he was actually hearing while living among the Pirahã that he waited nearly three decades before publishing his findings.

The debate over the Pirahã language goes right to the core of the riddle regarding how *Homo sapiens* managed to develop vocal communication. Although bees dance, birds sing and whales even sing with syntax, human language is unique, if only for the reason that it enables humans to piece together never-before-constructed thoughts, and be infinitely imaginative - think of Shakespeare's plays or Einstein's theory of relativity.

Linguistics generally focuses on what features all human languages have in common, but the Pirahã language departs from what some academics have long maintained are essential and inalienable features of all human languages. Most of all, it may be unique for not employing subordinate clauses. Instead of saying, 'When I have finished eating, I will speak to you,' the Pirahã say, 'I finish eating, I speak with you.' Equally perplexing, the Pirahã appear not to use numbers. During the time he spent with them, Everett never heard words like 'all', 'every' and 'more'. There is one word, 'hoi', that comes close to the numeral 1, but it can also mean 'small'. And they were never observed to count without language, on their fingers for example, in order to determine important tasks in village life like how many pieces of meat to grill.

Everett's findings among the Pirahã have brought new life to a controversial theory by the linguist Benjamin Whorf, who suggested that people are only capable of constructing thoughts for which they possess actual words. Or to put it another way, because they have no words for numbers, they cannot even begin to understand the concept of numbers or arithmetic.

The Warlpiri language - spoken by a group of Australian Aborigines - like that of the Pirahã, features only the most rudimentary system of counting. However, the Warlpiri people had no difficulty counting farther than three in a foreign language, in this case English, but when Everett attempted to teach the Pirahã how to count in Portuguese, like other Brazilians, not a single person could count to 10.

Everett is at pains to point out that the Pirahã are not unintelligent, for their thinking is not any slower than that of the average university student. And although they reside in a remote part of the forest, they do not live in complete genetic isolation, but mix with people from the surrounding populations and share similar intellectual capacities with their neighbours whose languages do contain numbers.

Eventually, after some 30 years of research, Everett has come up with a surprising explanation for the peculiarities of the Pirahã language. Language, he believes, is created by a people's way of life, their belief system and values. In this way, variety in human language is almost limitless, a function of the human capacity to live in different ways, such as in the forest. What Everett's research has revealed is that the central tenet of the Pirahã culture is to live in the here and now. The only thing of importance that is worth communicating to others is what is being experienced at that very moment, though this can often be described with great care and detail. In consequence, the language has no means to conjugate verbs in order to describe 'yesterday' or 'last week' or 'when I was a child'. Their very literal view of the world curtails abstract thought, and many features taken for granted among other peoples are absent among the Pirahã, such as a creation myth, storytelling and painting. One manifestation of their beliefs is that by tradition the names they give their children are not particularly imaginative. Often they are named after other members of the tribe with whom they share similar character traits. Standing out or being different is not encouraged by the Pirahã, and this is reflected in their perhaps colourless choice of names.

Everett anticipated that these findings would be controversial and the reaction came as expected. Until this point, many linguists had defended the theories of Noam Chomsky, according to which all human languages have a universal grammar. What exactly makes up this universal grammar is the subject of debate, but at its heart is the concept of 'recursion', which is defined as replication of a structure within its single parts. Without it, humans would not be able to view separate thoughts as subordinate parts of a complex whole. And, most pertinent to Everett's work, there would not be subordinate clauses, which are responsible for translating the concept of recursion into grammar. But if the Pirahã do not form subordinate clauses, then recursion cannot explain the uniqueness of human language, and this would negate Chomsky's theories.

The logical way forward now would be to try to prove that the Pirahã can think in a recursive fashion. The only problem is, nobody can confirm or deny Everett's observations since no other researcher can speak Pirahã as well as he does. Despite this, several researchers - including two of Chomsky's colleagues - will soon travel to Brazil to check his claims. My concern is that soon the Pirahã will simply become one more scientific oddity with every aspect of their lives being exploited and analysed.

Questions 27–32

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

Write the correct letter in boxes 27–32 on your answer sheet.

27 What are we told about Daniel Everett in the first paragraph?

- A** He has lived among the Pirahã since 1977.
- B** It took him seven years to learn the Pirahã language.
- C** No one would publish his research for three decades.
- D** Studying the Pirahã language is the focus of his work.

28 Which of the following is the best summary of the second paragraph?

- A** Humans are the only species to be linguistically creative.
- B** Humans, bees, birds and whales share a characteristic.
- C** Human language is not fully understood by scientists.
- D** Humans are the only species to use syntax.

29 Why does the writer refer to subordinate clauses?

- A** to criticise the general approach of linguistics
- B** to compare two features of the Pirahã language
- C** to explain why the Pirahã language is difficult to learn
- D** to exemplify an unusual feature of the Pirahã language

30 What point does the writer make about the work of Whorf?

- A** He thought that numbers were common to all human languages.
- B** His theory might be supported by Everett's research.
- C** His research enabled him to find a new life among the Pirahã.
- D** He predicted that people like the Pirahã would never be found.

31 The writer refers to the Warlpiri people in order to

- A** suggest that the Pirahã be taught to count in English.
- B** show how tribal peoples learn a foreign language.
- C** compare counting in English and Portuguese.
- D** illustrate the uniqueness of the Pirahã.

32 What is Everett's point about the Pirahã's intellectual capacities?

- A** Pirahã students have not graduated from universities.
- B** He does not want people to criticise their intelligence.
- C** Their isolation makes it difficult to evaluate their intelligence.
- D** He believes their language is more complex than their neighbours'.

Questions 33–36

Complete the summary using the list of words, **A–I**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A–I**, in boxes 33–36 on your answer sheet.

Everett's explanation

Everett believes that a group's language is a product of their 33 _____ and thus language is infinitely varied. During the time he spent living among them, he observed that the Pirahã only place value on the 34 _____ and have no 35 _____ to describe completed events. Similarly, the types of names they use reflect the fact that they do not celebrate 36 _____.

A present

B past

C time

D future

E culture

F grammar

G art

H individuality

I children

Questions 37–40

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

In boxes 37–40 on your answer sheet, write

YES if the statement agrees with the views of the writer

NO if the statement contradicts the views of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

37 Everett was surprised by the way his research was greeted.

38 Chomsky has been critical of Everett's research methodology.

39 If 'recursion' as a universal concept is disproved, Chomsky's ideas about language would be wrong.

40 The Pirahã will benefit from their new-found status among academics.

27–32 选择题

题号	答案	精确定位句 (第 X 段)	解释 (同义改写)
27	D	第1段: "...has committed his career to studying their puzzling speech."	说明他“把职业投入到研究皮拉罕语”，即研究皮拉罕语是其工作的重心。A说自1977年一直住在部落(误: 只是“累计七年”); B是“花七年学会语言”(文中无); C是“没人给他发表”(误: 是他自己等待近30年才发表)。
28	A	第2段: "human language is unique... it enables humans to piece together never-before-constructed thoughts, and be infinitely imaginative."	段落核心: 人类在语言上具有创造性/想象力 (linguistically creative)。D错误: 文中说鲸类也“sing with syntax”; B只是铺垫; C并非本段中心。
29	D	第3段: "it may be unique for not employing subordinate clauses. Instead of saying, 'When I have finished eating...' the Pirahã say, 'I finish eating, I speak with you!'"	提到从句是为了举例说明皮拉罕语的不寻常特征 (不用从句)。非批评学科 (A), 也非比较两特征 (B), 更非说明难学 (C)。
30	B	第4段: "Everett's findings... have brought new life to a controversial theory by Benjamin Whorf... people are only capable of constructing thoughts for which they possess actual words."	Everett 的发现可能支持沃尔夫的假说 (语言相对论/萨丕尔—沃尔夫假说)。A/C/D均与原文不符。
31	D	第5段: "The Warlpiri... had no difficulty counting... in English, but when Everett attempted to teach the Pirahã... not a single person could count to 10."	通过与瓦尔皮里人的对比, 凸显皮拉罕的独特性 (连外语数数也学不会)。并非建议用英语教学 (A)、展示部落学外语 (B) 或比较英葡 (C)。
32	B	第6段: "Everett is at pains to point out that the Pirahã are not unintelligent... and share similar intellectual capacities with their neighbours."	他的要点是为其智力辩护, 不希望他人误以为他们“愚笨”。C说“隔离使评估困难”被文中“并非完全隔离”否定; A/D与原文不符。

33–36 概要填空

空格	答案	精确定位句 (第 X 段)	解释
33	E culture	第7段: "Language... is created by a people's way of life, their belief system and values."	“生活方式、信仰与价值”即文化, 说明语言源自群体文化。
34	A present	第7段: "the central tenet... is to live in the here and now. The only thing... is what is being experienced at that very moment."	强调只重当下, 对应 present。
35	F grammar	第7段: "In consequence, the language has no means to conjugate verbs to describe 'yesterday'..."	“无动词变化的手段”= 缺乏表达完成事件 (过去/完成体) 的语法, 对应 grammar。
36	H individuality	第7段: "Standing out or being different is not encouraged... reflected in their... choice of names."	不鼓励“突出/不同”, 即不庆祝个体性/个体特质。

37–40 判断题 (YES/NO/NOT GIVEN)

题号	答案	精确定位句 (第 X 段)	解释
37	NO	第8段：“Everett anticipated that these findings would be controversial and the reaction came as expected. ”	题干说他“感到惊讶”，而原文说预料之中，故相反。
38	NOT GIVEN	—	文中仅说许多语言学家维护乔姆斯基理论、以及“Chomsky 的同事将赴巴西核查”。未提及“乔姆斯基批评其研究方法”。
39	YES	第8段：“if the Pirahã do not form subordinate clauses, then recursion cannot explain... and this would negate Chomsky's theories. ”	若“递归”作为普遍概念被推翻/不适用，则乔氏语言理论会被否定。
40	NO	第9段 (作者立场)：“My concern is that... the Pirahã will... be exploited and analysed. ”	作者担忧他们会被当作“科学奇观”而被过度利用，并非“受益”。