

Why would this be of any use? No one else had Merge. Whom did Prometheus talk to? Nobody, at least not using Merge. (Humans may already have been using cries and gestures, as many animals do.) But Merge-enabled, hierarchically structured language, according to Mr Chomsky, did not evolve for talking at all. Rather, it let Prometheus take simple concepts and combine them in sentence-like ways in his own head. The resulting complex thoughts gave him a survival advantage. If he then passed the mutant Merge gene on to several surviving children, who thrived and passed on the Merge gene to their children, Messrs Chomsky and Berwick believe that they must have then come to dominate the population of humans in Africa. Only later, as Merge came to work with the vocal and hearing organs, did human language emerge.

这能有什么用呢?别人又没有“合并”。“普罗米修斯”与谁去谈话?没有人,至少不用“合并”。(人类可能正如许多动物一般,一直使用叫喊还有手势。)但是根据乔姆斯基,合并型的、纵向结构的语言并不是为会话而进化。确切地说,这种语言使得“普罗米修斯”采取简单概念,并自己思考用句子的方式把它们结合起来。结果这些复杂思维给了他生存上的优势。如果他当时将这一突变的“合并”基因遗传给自己几位幸存的孩子,而他们继续繁衍并将“合并”基因传递给他们的小孩,乔姆斯基与贝里克认为想必他们那时已经主导了非洲人类。之后只有当“合并”与发音、听力器官相结合,人类语言才得以出现。

Many scholars find this to be somewhere between insufficient, improbable and preposterous. The emergence of a single mutation that gives such a big advantage is derided by biologists as a “hopeful monster” theory; most evolution is gradual, operating on many genes, not one. Some ability like Merge may exist, but this does not explain why some words may merge and others don't, much less why the world's languages merge so differently. (Not a single non-English example appears in “Why Only Us”, nor a single foreign language in its index.)

许多学者认为依靠具有“合并”大优势的单一突变体的这一语言进化理论是不充分、不恰当,而且荒谬的。同时这一观点也被生物学家讽刺为“有前途的怪诞”理论;就生物学上认为大多数进化是渐进型,需要很多基因共同作用,而不是单独一个。一些像“合并”的能力可能确实存在,但这不能解释为何一些词汇可能合并而其他不能,更不能解释为何这个世界的语言合并地如此不同。(《为什么我们是唯一的》书中所举的例子都是英语的,在索引里也没有一门外语)

Mr Chomsky says those who disagree with his ever-more contentious ideas are either blind or hucksters. Critics refer to a “cult” of “acolytes” around a “Great Leader”, unwilling to challenge him or engage seriously with the work of non-Chomsky scholars. (One critic has said “to be savaged by Chomsky is a badge of honour.”) Linguistics is now divided

into a Chomsky an camp, a large number of critics and many more still for whom the founder of the modern discipline is simply irrelevant. He is unlikely to end up like Freud, a marginal figure in modern psychology whose lasting influence has been on the humanities. Mr Chomsky's career is more likely to end up like Einstein's—at least in the sense that his best and most influential work came early on.

乔姆斯基表示，那些不同意他曾更具争议的想法的人都是瞎子或是跳梁小丑。批评家们把这些解释为一群围着“伟大领导者”打转的信徒们对乔姆斯基的狂热崇拜，他们不愿意挑战他或从事非乔姆斯基学派的学术工作。（一位批评家曾说过“被乔姆斯基抨击也荣幸之至”。）语言学如今被划分成乔姆斯基阵营、大量的批评者以及还有更多是与现代语言体系建立者不相关人等。乔姆斯基本身是不可能像心理学家佛洛伊德那样结束他的学术生涯——在现代心理学被边缘化，但却能一直对人性产生持续的影响。乔姆斯基最有可能像爱因斯坦那样——至少在狭义上，他在初期就开始推出最佳且最有影响力的学术著作。