

Etymology of the Term “Tear”

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THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

In the evolution of mammals, hominids appeared 25 million years ago. The earliest *Australopithecus* dates back to about 5 million years ago, the *Homo erectus* to 2 million years ago, and *Homo sapiens* to 200,000 years ago. The communication skills (corporal movements, sounds) developed and improved slowly from lower to higher mammals. When studies of paleo-anthropologic remains revealed a buccal-respiratory tract able to vocalize,^{1, 2} anthropologists deduced that the capacity to produce rather rich and differentiated articulated sounds appeared in the genus *Homo* about 200,000 years ago. Brain development probably increased commensurately with the ability to communicate at higher levels. Initially, however, early humans combined very poor language-like sounds with other modes of communication (mainly gestures with the face and hands, etc.).

The real *Homo* “loquens,” with a relatively rich conceptual vocabulary, seems to have emerged only 30,000 years ago. They developed an exponential complexity in their vocal intercommunication skills, which was the driving force in a process of mutual cause and effect that enhanced mental concepts and brain complexity.

Language appeared in three basic stages: onomatopoeic, symbolic, and associative. Onomatopoeia was the phonetic simulation of environmental sounds to represent the object or the

phenomenon that produced this noise (e.g., “grrr,” “sss”). Later, these phonetic noises evolved to mean other objects, phenomena, or abstractions that, in some way bore some relation with the onomatopoeic sound that the phenomenon represented (e.g., “growl,” “hiss”). Finally, in the associative step, several symbolic phonemes were joined to express more complex associations, resulting little by little in the immense vocabulary we have today. Despite its size, our vocabulary today still has limitations in describing the myriad concepts with which the human mind works.

DISCOVERY OF THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGES

The several thousand languages and dialects identified today seems to have very few different origins. They developed from one or only a few seeds spoken by our ancestors 20 to 30 millennia ago.³ These languages have been grouped according to deduced associated origins in African (Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan, etc.), Sino-Tibetan (Mandarin, Cantonese, Tibetan, Burmese, etc.), Austronesian (Melanesians, Tagalog/Pilipino, Chamorro, Tahitian, Madagascan, etc.), Australian (Tiwi, Aranda, Warlpiri, etc.), Indo-Pacific (Papuan, Andamanese, extinct Tasmanian, etc.), Amerindian (Penutian, Mayan, Zuñi, Andean, etc.), and Nostratic. A small number of languages seem to be isolated (Basque, Iberian, Etruscan,

Table 1. Percent divergence between two languages according to time of separation of populations.

Number of years without relationship between populations	Divergence between languages (%)
100	1
200	5
400	10
700	20
1000	30
1700	40
2300	50
3000	60
4000	70
6000	80
10000	90
15000	95
25000	99

Modified from Crystall D. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, 2nd edition. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.⁴

Sumerian, Nahali, Het, etc.).^{3,4}

Nostratic⁵ is the name given to a possible linguistic common trunk that may have existed about 15,000 years ago in the Middle East,^{4,7} from which the Afro-Asiatic (Semitic, Old Egyptian, Bereber), Eskimo-Aleut (Yupik, Greenlandic Eskimo, etc.), Altaic (Turkish, Mongolian, Japanese, Korean), Uralian (Finnish, Hungarian, Samoyed), Indo-European, and a few other small groups of languages may derive.^{7, 8} The Proto-Indo-European language, coming or not from the Nostratic, is where we must look for the origin of the word *tear*, because it is assumed that the equivalent to tear in other languages appeared independently after their separation from a common trunk with Proto-Indo-European.

THE RETROSPECTIVE JOURNEY TO DISCOVER THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGES

The first historical explanation of the diversity of languages was a divine punishment for the human arrogance displayed during the construction of the Tower of Babel, a Sumerian myth recounted in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ There was no concept of a slow evolution in these languages.

Until recently, people did not notice that they spoke somewhat differently from their parents and even more differently from their grand parents, a trend that has always existed and over time has produced major changes and a variety of languages. For thousands of years, languages were considered to be immutable, despite the evidence that, although neighboring people spoke different languages, the languages had many similarities. A common origin was not suspected. When educated people of ancient times realized that differences existed between their speech and the written words of previous epochs of their respective countries, they considered it to be due to educational differences, not evolution.

The concept of the evolution of languages emerged weakly during the Renaissance. Jaeger (1686)¹⁰ suggested that there was an ancient language in the Caucasus, from which Greek, Latin, Slave, Germanic and Scytho-Persian languages were derived. Thus, the idea of a Proto-Indo-European language was born. Schlegel (1808)¹¹ hypothesized an origin in India. The term Indo-European is found for the first time cited by the British physician, optic researcher, polyglot, and Egyptologist Thomas Young (1813).¹²

When philologists began to compare related language families, seeking the evolution of phonetic rules that were repeated in many words, they started a return journey through history from the present to earliest times, discovering the genodendron of languages. Today, hypotheses of linguistic families are more and more realistic. The rate of linguistic divergence in meaning and form of words

from the same cultural group that separate into two branches is not the same for all languages, but the following is an estimation of the chronology of glottochronological changes (Table 1).

PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN

The Proto-Indo-European languages appeared about 8,000 years ago. Because the written word did not exist at that time, knowledge of the evolution of these languages is speculated based on the divergent differences of subsequent written languages with specific repetitive similarities for each language. Evidence of evolutionary patterns has also been gleaned from paleontologic knowledge of the geography, flora, fauna, manufactured products, and superstitions of the people who spoke those languages. The location of the original Proto-Indo-European people is still not well established. Some researchers think that they lived in East Asia Minor (Iwanov-Gramkrelidze),¹³ Anatolia, (the western end of the present Asian Turkey),¹⁴ but the most prevalent current idea is that they were located in the

steppe north of the Black and Caspian Seas, and Lake Aral (Figure 1).^{15,16}

About 7,000 years ago, a population of semi-nomadic and agricultural



Figure 1. Original location of Proto-Indo-European language, in horizontal lines (according to Iwanov-Gramkrelidze),¹³ in vertical lines (according to Renfrew),¹⁴ and in squares (according to Gimbutas).¹⁶ In dots, extension of Indo-European languages in the V century AD.

people was living in the steppe region that is now known as southern Russia. There is practically no blood relationship with the population now living there. Maybe people immigrated from other Uralic and Altaic linguistic families, which had been separated several thousand years before, as they had some linguistic simi-



Figure 2. Countries in which a Indo-European language is the mother/native or co-official language (in vertical lines), and specifically English (in black).

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