

What is language?

- The method of human communication, either spoken or written, consists of using words in a structured and conventional way.
- Language is a system of words or signs that people use to express their thoughts and feelings. (merriam-webster.com)
- Language is a system of communication, a medium for thought and social interaction.
- In addition, language is a system of symbols, with several levels of the organization, at least phonetics (the sounds), syntax (the grammar), and semantics (the meanings).

Language is Ubiquitous

- Present everywhere
– in all activities
- As important as the air we breathe



When did Language Start?

 I'm going to be honest with you. I don't have most of the answers to any of the questions that I will ask. But that's the point of the learning process and the fun in it. I'm searching for answers, trying to understand them and putting them together, along with you.

Hunting for information online

 [This article](#) from www.theconversation.com seems to suggest that humans evolved to make some type of language sounds for the first time 70,000 years ago. And it is only 20,000 years ago that we managed to come up with enough different sounds to have a system of meaning and a way of putting them together into a language. Of course, we were communicating before this too, but probably not as effectively.

 Other articles on the internet will have slightly different takes. For example [this wikipedia page](#) suggests that some form of language could have originated as early as 2.5 million years ago. [This UCI school of sciences article](#) says that humans could have started talking anytime in the 300,000 years since we evolved, but we started writing only around 5,000 years back.

 There's a bunch of stuff that I have written about humans evolving and the timeline of human history. I'm sure you're curious, but we'll get to all of that in good time too. Right now, we're just focused on this language situation.

 So, what do we now know about when language began? Not very much with certainty. And that isn't too surprising. After all, no one who is alive today was there when it began. Documenting history would have been tough at the time that language started. After all, language evolved pretty gradually. First, just a few simple sounds to communicate those things that were most important. And then the range of possible sounds increased. We started combining those sounds together to form more complex words. At some stage we had so many sounds and words meaning different things that we even put in place rules for how they should be used together. We call these rules grammar. Okay, that's pretty much what the experts agree on in terms of when and how language began.