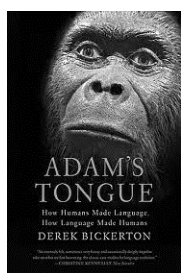


It's not all talk

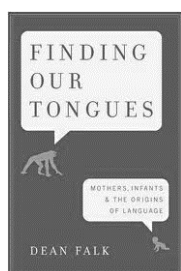
Adam's Tongue: How humans made language, how language made humans by Derek Bickerton

Finding Our Tongues: Mothers, infants and the origins of language by Dean Falk

1



WHY is it that 20th-century physicists could ask some of the most grandiose questions in science, but if a researcher wondered aloud where language came from, the response was derisive at best. Not only can you not answer the question, they were told, you shouldn't even ask. There are many reasons why language



evolution was a bit of a scientific embarrassment, but two are particularly significant.

2

First was the quite reasonable objection that there was no tangible evidence. You can't uncover earlier forms of language in the same way you can track a species through deep time. Fortunately, this is changing. Recent work in areas such as animal cognition, the genetics of speech disorders and the comparative evolution of the brain are contributing to our expanding picture of how language unfolded.

3

Language origins, moreover, had a whiff of taboo because a dismissive attitude had become entrenched among key figures in science. Now that too is changing. In the last 10 years there has been a flurry of papers, presentations and books on the subject. Two of the latest are *Adam's Tongue* by Derek Bickerton and *Finding Our Tongues* by Dean Falk.

4

Bickerton, professor emeritus at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, has been writing about language evolution for a long time. He began his career in language evolution as a devout Chomskian, committed to the idea that syntax is the be-all and end-all and, ironically, sceptical that we can know much about language evolution at all. Over the years, 31, he has shown more interest in other accounts of evolutionary change. In *Adam's Tongue* he elaborates on the compelling "niche-construction theory": the idea that a species creates its environment, which in turn shapes later generations of the species, and so on.

5

Adam's Tongue is not a measured overview of the field. Rather, it is an intensely felt, sometimes very funny and occasionally deeply impolite take on what are fast becoming the classic case studies for language evolution — vervet monkey alarm calls, singing gibbons, signing apes, tool use in different species, the emergence of

intelligent behaviour, language learning in babies and the lifestyles of hunter-gatherers. At its least balanced, the book caricatures the argument for continuity in language evolution, which says that humans' similarity to other animals is relevant to language. Continuists explore all the ways that animal thought and communication may have provided a foundation on which human language evolved. Bickerton, however, portrays this approach as a simple-minded belief that human language evolved directly from animal communication.

6 Bickerton's most intriguing argument is that scavenging meat had huge ramifications for human language. The logistical challenges of retrieving meat from, say, a mammoth are immense. You need a lot of humans to do the work — cutting the skin, getting the meat and, crucially, warding off other predators. How do you gather many humans to the right spot? To render a complicated theory in one word: language.

7 Where Bickerton is pugnacious, Falk is dispassionate, though she too sees a crucial role for food in eliciting language. Falk believes that human language arose from the relationship between mothers and babies. In her "putting the baby down" hypothesis, she notes that while ape infants can cling to their mothers, human children cannot. So when ancient mothers had to put their children down in order to harvest food, Falk

believes they used language-like communication as a way of protecting and guiding their behaviour 33.

8 Falk makes a strong case that communication between mothers and babies is a linguistic crucible. She refutes recent suggestions that "motherese", the highpitched sing-song otherwise known as baby-talk, is not a universal behaviour. Indeed, mothers from all cultures speak to their children with some kind of motherese, and one experiment even showed that mothers make unconscious distinctions if they are using baby-talk with a child as opposed to a pet. Falk, however, never makes a strong case for exactly how language was built over the platform of motherese.

9 Language evolution spoilsports will take the differences between these books as evidence of disarray in the field, or even that its underlying question is unanswerable. This would be short-sighted. Key ideas and themes, which are bound to influence future research, appear in both books. Watch out in coming years for more on cognitive/biological phase transitions, the evolutionary significance of social interaction, the asymmetry between speakers and hearers and, one for all of us including the physicists, the need to be wary of blanket explanations.

adapted from Christine Kenneally
in *New Scientist*, 2009

Tekst 7 It's not all talk

- 1p 29 Which of the following is emphasised in paragraph 1?
- A The controversial findings of scientific research into language origins.
 - B The failure of linguists to come up with research questions that match those of physicists.
 - C The low esteem the study of language evolution has been held in.
 - D The short history of linguistics as a scientific discipline.
- 2p 30 “but two are particularly significant” (einde alinea 1)
Welke toelichting wordt bij elk van deze redenen gegeven?
Geef antwoord door de volgende zinnen aan te vullen.
Reden 1 wordt toegelicht in de zin die begint met (geef de eerste twee woorden)...
Reden 2 wordt toegelicht in de zin die begint met (geef de eerste twee woorden)...
- 1p 31 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 4?
- A after all
 - B for example
 - C moreover
 - D though
- 1p 32 Which of the following statements is in agreement with the contents of paragraphs 5 and 6?
- A Bickerton believes that animal and human communication share the same origins.
 - B Bickerton has a witty way of showing that humans should not take animal behaviour as an example to be followed.
 - C Bickerton makes clear that language has developed by fits and starts.
 - D Bickerton supposes that there is a causal relationship between hunting and language.
- 1p 33 Which of the following completes the last sentence of paragraph 7?
- A from afar
 - B in a natural manner
 - C in changing surroundings

- 1p 34 What is Falk's view, according to paragraph 8?
- A All over the world mothers tell their babies the same things.
 - B Mothers teach their children basic vocabulary by singing words to them.
 - C Mothers stimulate their children's language development by means of baby-talk.
 - D The language development of children is highly dependent on their mother's linguistic skills.
- 1p 35 Welke vraag wordt bedoeld met "its underlying question" in alinea 9?

Hieronder staan twee conclusies over de boekbespreking en vier citaten waaruit die conclusie zou moeten blijken. Slechts één van deze conclusies is juist.

- 1p 36 Noteer het nummer van de **juiste** conclusie en de letter van het bijpassende ondersteunende citaat.

Conclusies	
1 Christine Kenneally is uiteindelijk negatief over de twee gerecenseerde boeken.	a Dit blijkt uit de zin "Falk, however, never makes a strong case for exactly how language was built over the platform of motherese." (alinea 8)
2 Christine Kenneally is uiteindelijk positief over de twee gerecenseerde boeken.	b Dit blijkt uit de zin "Language evolution spoilsports will take the differences between these books as evidence of disarray in the field, or even that its underlying question is unanswerable." (alinea 9)
	c Dit blijkt uit de zin "This would be short-sighted." (alinea 9)
	d Dit blijkt uit de zin "Key ideas and themes, which are bound to influence future research, appear in both books." (alinea 9)

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.