

Universidade Federal Fluminense
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos de Linguagem
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos de Literatura

Prova de Língua Instrumental - Inglês
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Leia o texto abaixo e registre as soluções para as questões que o seguem na Folha de Respostas.

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Origins of Language

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1 Introduction

(1) Among the inhabitants of some African forests about eight million years ago were ape-like creatures including the common ancestors of chimpanzees and humans. Visualizing what these creatures were probably like is easy enough; one conjures up an image of something resembling a modern gorilla, living substantially in trees and walking on all four limbs when on the ground, and with a vocal communication system limited to perhaps twenty or thirty calls, like a chimpanzee's. But what about our ancestors' appearance and behavior two million years ago? By that stage they were a separate species from the ancestors of chimpanzees, but were not yet homo sapiens. How did these creatures live, and in particular what sort of language did they have? Visualizing these more recent creatures is harder. One feels that they must have been more like us, and in particular that their vocal communication system must have been more sophisticated than that of their ancestors six million years earlier. But how much more sophisticated? Which characteristics of modern human language did this communication system now possess, and which did it still lack?

(2) There is something eerie and yet fascinating about these intermediate ancestors. This fascination underlies innumerable science fiction stories as well as the perennial interest in rumors that such creatures may still exist, in some remote Himalayan valley perhaps. To many nonlinguists, therefore, it seems self-evident that research on the linguistic abilities of such intermediate ancestors (that is, research on the origins and evolution of human language) should be a high priority in linguistics. Yet it is not. As a research topic, language evolution is only now beginning to regain respectability, after more than a century of neglect. In the remainder of this section I will say something about the reasons for this neglect before turning in sections 2-5 to the evidence recently brought to bear by anthropologists, geneticists, primatologists and neurobiologists, many of whom have for decades been more adventurous than linguists in this area. Then in section 6, I will discuss the kinds of contribution which some linguists also are now beginning to offer.

(3) Many religions provide an account of the origin of language. According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, God gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden dominion over all the animals, and Adam's first exercise of this dominion consisted in naming them. The

fact that there are now many languages rather than just one is explained in the story of the Tower of Babel: linguistic diversity is a punishment for human arrogance. So long as that sort of account was generally accepted, the origin of language was not a puzzle. But when secular explanations for natural phenomena began to be sought to supplement or replace religious ones, it was inevitable that a secular explanation was sought for the origin of language too.

(4) The fact that the origin of language must predate recorded history did not inhibit eighteenth-century thinkers such as Rousseau, Condillac, and Herder, who were confident that simply by applying one's mind to the situation in which languageless humans would find themselves one could arrive at worthwhile conclusions about how language must have arisen. Unfortunately there was no consensus among these conclusions, and in the nineteenth century they came to seem increasingly feeble and speculative by contrast with the far-reaching yet convincing results attainable in historical and comparative linguistics (see chapter 5). At its foundation in 1866, therefore, the Linguistic Society of Paris chose to emphasize its seriousness as a scholarly body by including in its statutes a ban on the presentation of any papers concerning the origin of language. Most linguists still support this ban, in the sense that they believe that any inquiry into the origin of language must inevitably be so speculative as to be worthless.

(5) Since the 1960s, the theory of grammar has come to be dominated by the ideas of Noam Chomsky, for whom the central question of linguistics is the nature of the innate biological endowment which enables humans to acquire a language so rapidly and efficiently in the first year of life (see chapter 19). From this viewpoint, it seems natural to regard the origin of language as a matter of evolutionary biology: how did this innate linguistic endowment evolve in humans, and what are its counterparts (if any) in other primates? But Chomsky has explicitly discouraged interest in language evolution, and has even suggested that language is so different from most other animal characteristics that it may be a product of physical or chemical processes rather than biological ones (1988: 167, 1991: 50). The paradoxical result is that, while Chomskyan linguists endeavor to explain characteristics of individual languages by reference to an innate linguistic endowment (or Universal Grammar), they are generally reluctant to pursue their inquiry one stage further, to the issue of how and why this innate endowment has acquired the particular characteristics that it has. To be sure, there are exceptions (e.g. Newmeyer 1991, Pinker and Bloom 1990, Pinker 1994). Nevertheless, Chomsky's influence means that linguists' reluctance to tackle this area is eroding only slowly.

(6) In view of what has been said, it is not surprising that there is a shortage of introductory surveys of this topic from a linguistic point of view; but Aitchison (1996) can be recommended, as well as part II of W.Foley (1997). Hurford et al. (1998) is an up-to-date collection of contributions from a variety of disciplines.

In: Aronoff, M.; Rees-Miller, J. 2003. *The Handbook of Linguistics* (Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics). Kindle Edition.

1. Assinale a alternativa que não reflete uma ideia contida no texto. (2 pt)

- (a) Muitas religiões procuram explicar a origem da linguagem.
- (b) O estudo da origem das línguas sempre foi uma prioridade entre os linguistas.

- (c) Chomsky explica as características das línguas por referência à Gramática Universal.
- (d) No campo da linguística são escassas as pesquisas sobre a origem da linguagem.
2. De acordo com o parágrafo 1, classifique cada uma das afirmações usando verdadeiro (V) ou falso (F). (2 pt)
- a. () Há oito milhões de anos nossos ancestrais já eram uma espécie separada daquela dos ancestrais dos chimpanzés.
- b. () Há dois milhões de anos nossos ancestrais já pertenciam à espécie *Homo Sapiens*.
- c. () Pode-se conjecturar que os hominídeos de oito milhões de anos atrás possuíam um sistema vocal limitado.
- d. () Pode-se dizer com exatidão em que medida a linguagem dos hominídeos de dois milhões de anos atrás era superior à dos seus ancestrais.
3. Segundo o texto, determinado evento motivou a busca por uma explicação não religiosa para a origem da linguagem. Retire do texto o trecho que identifica esse evento. (2 pt)
4. Segundo o texto, com qual finalidade a Sociedade Linguística de Paris estabeleceu, em sua fundação, a proibição de quaisquer trabalhos sobre a origem da linguagem? Responda em português. (2 pt)
5. Considere o trecho abaixo:
- The paradoxical result is that, while Chomskyan linguists endeavor to explain characteristics of individual languages by reference to an innate linguistic endowment (or Universal Grammar), they are generally reluctant to pursue their inquiry one stage further, to the issue of how and why this innate endowment has acquired the particular characteristics that it has.* (parágrafo 5)
- A qual elemento se refere o pronome sublinhado? (1 pt)
6. Considere os trechos abaixo:
- There is something eerie and yet fascinating about these intermediate ancestors.* (parágrafo 2)
- ... in the nineteenth century they (the conclusions) came to seem increasingly feeble and speculative ...* (parágrafo 4)
- Qual é o sentido das palavras sublinhadas? Correlacione as colunas. (1 pt)
- a. *eerie* () frágil
- b. *fascinating* () misterioso
- c. *feeble* () atraente
- d. *speculative* () conjectural

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FOLHA DE RESPOSTAS

1. (a) (b) (c) (d) (2 pt)

2. a. () b. () c. () d. () (2 pt)

3. (2 pt)

4. (2 pt)

5. (1 pt)

6. () () () () (1 pt)

ATENÇÃO
SOMENTE A FOLHA DE RESPOSTAS SERÁ CORRIGIDA