



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE PUZZLE OF LANGUAGE ORIGINS

A

How and when human language began remains one of science's most stubborn puzzles, partly because the very object of inquiry leaves almost no direct trace. Stone tools, bones, hearths, and pigments can be excavated; spoken interaction cannot. Researchers therefore reconstruct early language indirectly, combining clues from archaeology, paleoanthropology, primate studies, genetics, and linguistics. Any persuasive account must explain a profound transition: how a symbolic system with rule-governed structure and virtually limitless productivity could arise from primate communication that is comparatively restricted, context-bound, and low in recursivity. The evidential gap also produces methodological caution: competing theories often emphasise different pressures, and the field is prone to “just-so” stories unless proposals can be tied to converging lines of evidence.

B

One influential family of explanations treats language as a solution to the problem of social scale. As hominin groups expanded, maintaining cohesion through one-to-one physical grooming would have become increasingly time-consuming. The Social Grooming Hypothesis argues that vocal interaction offered a more efficient mechanism for sustaining social bonds, because speech could reach multiple listeners at once and could be deployed while hands were occupied with other tasks. In this view, gossip and reputation tracking are not trivial add-ons but core functions: they allow individuals to monitor alliances, punish defectors, and coordinate cooperation in larger networks. Language, here, is less a tool for describing the physical world than a technology for managing social life, enabling trust and reciprocity beyond immediate kin.

C

Other accounts put less weight on bonding and more on practical coordination. Hominin survival increasingly depended on complex skills and planned collective action: making multi-step tools, teaching novices, and coordinating hunting or foraging strategies across time and space. The Tool-Making Hypothesis suggests that the cognitive demands of crafting—sequencing, hierarchical planning, and error correction—favoured communicative systems capable of symbolic instruction. Related proposals emphasise cooperation in hunting large game: if roles must be assigned, timings synchronised, and locations communicated, then a more expressive medium becomes advantageous. These



views treat language as an organising device for goal-directed group behaviour, a way to transmit procedural knowledge and align intentions within a team.

D

A different line of thought shifts attention from vocal speech to gesture and multimodal communication. Some researchers argue that early hominins relied heavily on mimetic signalling—pointing, pantomime, and coordinated hand movements—before speech became dominant. From this perspective, vocal language did not simply replace gesture; it layered onto it, producing a hybrid system in which face, hands, posture, and voice jointly convey meaning. Modern conversation still displays this architecture: intonation, rhythm, and gesture often disambiguate reference and intention more efficiently than words alone. The multimodal view also addresses a common evolutionary constraint: gestures are visible and iconic, making them suitable for bootstrapping shared meaning, while vocalisation can later increase range, operate in darkness, and free the hands for tool use.

E

Biological evidence is frequently invoked, though it rarely supports simple “gene for language” narratives. The FOXP2 gene is often discussed because certain mutations correlate with severe speech and language disorders, implying a role in motor control for articulation and in aspects of sequencing and learning. However, FOXP2 is better understood as a regulatory component within a broader genetic network rather than a single switch that “turns language on.” Its evolutionary changes may have helped refine neural timing and the fine-grained control needed for fluent speech, but such biological readiness would still require cultural transmission and social learning to generate a fully shared linguistic system. In other words, genetics may supply anatomical precursors and learning biases, not a complete grammar.

F

Anatomy provides additional but still ambiguous clues. Speech depends on breath control, a finely tuned vocal tract, and neural systems that coordinate rapid timing—capacities that do not fossilise neatly. Researchers sometimes examine the hyoid bone, which contributes to tongue and laryngeal function, as one proxy for vocal potential. Finds suggesting that *Homo heidelbergensis* possessed a hyoid comparable in form to that of modern humans are often cited to argue that speech-like vocalisation could have been possible earlier than “late emergence” accounts assume. Yet capacity for varied sound production is not the same as possessing a rule-based language. A creature might produce many distinct calls without having the combinatorial machinery required for building abstract propositions, embedding clauses, or expressing counterfactuals.



G

This distinction between speech and grammar leads to what many researchers consider the hardest explanatory target: syntax. The puzzle is not merely how hominins gained the physical ability to speak, but how they acquired the cognitive and cultural mechanisms that allow small units to be combined into hierarchical structures with stable meanings. Archaeologists sometimes treat symbolic artefacts—engraved objects, ornaments, or figurative representations—as indirect indicators of sophisticated shared conventions, though such proxies are interpreted cautiously because symbolism can be partial and domain-specific. The field is also divided between gradualist accounts, which see relevant capacities accumulating across multiple hominin species, and “cognitive revolution” models, which propose a relatively late coalescence of fully productive language. A compromise view is increasingly common: anatomical and cognitive prerequisites may have built up over long timescales, while the final consolidation of shared, flexible syntax may have occurred later under particular cultural conditions such as larger populations, denser social networks, or more reliable teaching. Whatever the timeline, the best-supported explanations tend to be pluralist, combining social, practical, biological, and cultural pressures rather than insisting on a single trigger.

Questions 27–31

Which paragraph contains the following information?

- 27** a conclusion that the strongest explanations do not depend on a single cause.
- 28** a view that language developed to support planning, teaching, and organised group action.
- 29** a warning that being able to make sounds does not necessarily mean having grammar.
- 30** an explanation that speech can maintain relationships more efficiently than physical contact in large groups.
- 31** a statement that researchers must rely on several indirect disciplines because language leaves no direct evidence.

Questions 32–35

Choose **YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

- 32** The Tool-Making Hypothesis is presented as linking language development to advanced planning and teaching.



33 The passage suggests that gesture-based communication only emerged after speech had already become dominant.

34 The writer claims that FOXP2 contributes to speech and language but is not a single “language gene”.

35 The passage confirms that Homo heidelbergensis possessed the same rule-based language ability as modern humans.

Questions 36–40

Complete the summary below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Evidence and theories of language origins

As hominin communities grew, maintaining group **36** through one-to-one grooming became increasingly demanding. In biological accounts, FOXP2 is viewed as one regulator within a wider genetic **37**, rather than as a stand-alone language switch. Anatomical evidence about possible vocal capacity includes the **38** bone, although the ability to produce varied sounds does not itself demonstrate grammar. The most difficult feature of language origins to account for may be **39** One compromise explanation also identifies larger populations, denser social networks and more reliable **40** as conditions that may have supported the later consolidation of flexible language.

Answer Key

27. G

28. C

29. F

30. B

31. A

32. YES

33. NO

34. YES

35. NO

36. cohesion



37. network

38. hyoid

39. syntax

40. teaching