

Human speech is 8 times older than we thought

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Researchers say they have found the likely time in history when human beings first began to speak. Dr Steven Mithen, an archaeologist and expert in prehistory, suggested that basic language was formed around 1.6 million years ago. This is eight times earlier than many scientists thought. Experts in evolution previously believed that spoken human language began around 200,000 years ago. Mithen said his studies show that the first human language developed either in eastern or southern Africa. He said the ability to speak helped evolution. He said speech was, "without doubt, the key which made much of subsequent human physical and cultural evolution possible".

Dr Mithen explains how he believes human speech developed so long ago in his new book called, "The Language Puzzle". He says our brain quickly increased in size just over 1.5 million years ago. This increase changed the structure of our brain. An area called the frontal lobe developed. This is the part of the brain that produces language. Another important change was the development of our vocal tract. This is where we produce sound, and therefore speech. Mithen said speech allowed humans to spread around the world. It meant humans could do three important things. They could think of and plan future actions, and they could pass on knowledge. Mithen said language "changed the human story profoundly".

Sources: independent.co.uk / yahoo.com / sciworthy.com

Writing

Everyone should learn at least one second language. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

researchers / history / human beings / archaeologist / scientists / language / evolution / long ago / new book / puzzle / sound / important things / planning / future actions

True / False

- 1) An archaeologist looked into when humans first began to speak. T / F
- 2) An expert said spoken language first started 1.6 million years ago. T / F
- 3) The expert said human speech first started in South Africa. T / F
- 4) An expert said speech made the evolution of culture possible. T / F
- 5) The expert wrote a book called "The Puzzled Language". T / F
- 6) An area of the brain called the rear lobe developed 1.5 million years ago. T / F
- 7) Sound comes from a part of our body called the vocal tract. T / F
- 8) The expert said sound meant humans could plan future actions. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1. likely | a. fundamental |
| 2. expert | b. research |
| 3. basic | c. societal |
| 4. previously | d. specialist |
| 5. began | e. aided |
| 6. studies | f. started |
| 7. ability | g. probable |
| 8. helped | h. following |
| 9. subsequent | i. skill |
| 10. cultural | j. earlier |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) Would you like to read Dr Mithen's book?
- c) What do you know about the brain?
- d) What sounds in English are the most difficult to hear or say?
- e) What advice do you have to pronounce English well?
- f) How will technology change human speech?
- g) What do you think the human story will be like from now?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the experts?

Phrase Match

1. they have found the likely
 2. an archaeologist and
 3. the ability
 4. without
 5. physical and cultural
 6. our brain quickly increased
 7. This increase changed the structure
 8. This is where we produce
 9. they could pass
 10. language changed the human story
- a. profoundly
 - b. on knowledge
 - c. evolution
 - d. in size
 - e. expert in prehistory
 - f. sound
 - g. time in history
 - h. of our brain
 - i. doubt
 - j. to speak

Discussion – Student B

- a) How do you think humans started to speak?
- b) What do you think the first words spoken by humans were?
- c) What do you know about prehistory?
- d) Why do we have so many languages in the world?
- e) How difficult is it to speak English?
- f) What do you know about human evolution?
- g) What do you think of your native language?
- h) What other languages would you like to learn?

Spelling

1. the lkeliy time in history
2. an archaeologist and pxerte in prehistory
3. in srtaene or southern Africa
4. the abtiily to speak
5. without bduto
6. physical and cultural oleiutvon
7. human speech dpedlvoe so long ago
8. changed the erscututr of our brain
9. the development of our vlaco tract
10. speech laeldow humans to spread
11. they could pass on dgoweekln
12. changed the human story yupfordoln

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. a	4. j	5. f
6. b	7. i	8. e	9. h	10. c

Role Play

Role A – Spoken Language

You think spoken language is the most important language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their languages aren't so important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): body language, sign language or written language.

Role B – Body Language

You think body language is the most important language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their languages aren't so important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): spoken language, sign language or written language.

Role C – Sign Language

You think sign language is the most important language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their languages aren't so important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): body language, spoken language or written language.

Role D – Written Language

You think written language is the most important language. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their languages aren't so important. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): body language, sign language or spoken language.

Speaking – Languages

Rank these with your partner. Put the best at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Spoken language
- Poetic language
- Coding
- Sign language
- Body language
- Technical language
- Bad language
- Written language

Answers – True False

1	T	2	T	3	F	4	T	5	F	6	F	7	T	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.