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Human speech is 8 times older than we thought – 21st March 2024

Level 0

Researchers may have found when humans first spoke - 1.6 million years ago. This is eight times earlier than we thought. Studies show that the first human language came from Africa. An expert said speech was the key which made a lot of human physical and cultural changes possible.

The expert wrote a book about language. He says our brain got bigger 1.5 million years ago. An area for language developed in our brain. Also, tissue in our neck made sounds and speech possible. Speech allowed humans to move all over the world. Humans could think of and plan things, and pass on knowledge.

Level 1

Researchers may have found the time in history when humans first spoke. An expert believes that language started 1.6 million years ago. This is eight times earlier than we thought. Experts thought spoken human language began 200,000 years ago. Studies show that the first human language developed in Africa. The expert said speech was, "without doubt, the key which made much of...human physical and cultural evolution possible".

The expert wrote about human speech in a book called, "The Language Puzzle". He says our brain got bigger 1.5 million years ago. An area for language developed in our brain. Another important development was of tissue that could make sounds, and therefore speech. Speech allowed humans to move all over the world. It meant humans could think of and plan future actions, and they could pass on knowledge.

Level 2

Researchers may have found the time in history when human beings first spoke. An expert in prehistory believes that basic language started 1.6 million years ago. This is eight times earlier than scientists thought. Experts previously believed that spoken human language began 200,000 years ago. Studies show that the first human language developed in eastern or southern Africa. He said the ability to speak helped evolution. The expert said speech was, "without doubt, the key which made much of...human physical and cultural evolution possible".

The expert wrote about how human speech developed in his new book called, "The Language Puzzle". He says our brain increased in size over 1.5 million years ago. This changed the structure of our brain. An area developed that produced language. Another important change was the development of tissue that could make sounds, and therefore speech. This allowed humans to move all over the world. It meant humans could think of and plan future actions, and they could pass on knowledge. The expert said language changed the human story enormously.

Level 3

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".