

## Chapter Three: Origins of Language

### 1. DIVINE SOURCE

# Judeo-Christian beliefs → God gave Adam the power to name all things

# Hindu tradition → Sarasvati, wife of Brahma, is credited with bringing language to humanity

# Egyptians → creator of speech was the god Thoth

# Babylonians → language giver was the god Nabu

# Experiments → if human infants grow up without hearing any language around them, then they would spontaneously begin using the original God-given language

Psammetichus in Egypt (2500)

King James the Fourth in Scotland (500)

Akbar the Great in Mongolia (400)

### 2. NATURAL SOUND SOURCE

#### 2.1. Ding-dong Theory

People happened to make noises when they encountered certain objects, actions and phenomena, e.g., *boom* for explosion

#### 2.2. Bow-wow Theory

People imitated the sounds of the environment especially animal sounds, e.g., *bow-wow* for dog

- **Note:** support for ding-dong theory and bow-wow theory comes from *onomatopoeic words*

#### 2.3. Pooh-pooh Theory

Speech emerged because people made instinctive sounds, caused by natural cries of emotion such as pain, fear, surprise, anger, etc.

- **Note:** interjections such as *Ah!*, *Ooh!*, *Wow!* or *Yuck!* are usually produced with sudden intakes of breath

#### 2.4. La-la Theory

Speech emerged from the sounds of playfulness, love, poetic sensibility, and song as an expressive need

#### 2.5. Yo-he-ho Theory

Sounds of a person involved in physical effort could be the source of our language

- **Note:** social context → **social interaction source**

### 3. ORAL GESTURE SOURCE

A set of physical gestures was developed as a means of communication → a set of oral gestures developed according to patterns of movement similar to physical gestures

## 4. GLOSSOGENETICS

**Continuity view** → language ability as a difference in degree between humans and other primates  
→ has a Darwinian perspective

**Discontinuity view** → onset of language ability is a qualitative leap, e.g., Chomsky's language organ: a sporadic mutation in our species

### 4.1. Physical Adaptation Source

Physical aspects not shared with any other creatures: our ancestors made a major transition to an upright posture; teeth are upright; lips have much more intricate muscle; human mouth is relatively small; etc.

### 4.2. Tool-making Source

# One function must have been superimposed on existing anatomical features

# Manual gestures may have been a precursor of language: functions that control the motor movements involved in speaking and making tools are very close to each other

### 4.3. Genetic Source

Humans are born with a special capacity for language → **innateness hypothesis** (something in human genetics)