

Review and prospect for the Research on Language Origin

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Abstract: *The origin of language is still a pending major issue. The basic connotation of language origin includes the definition of language, the conditions of language origin, the specific process of language origin, and the relationship between language origin and naming of things. The study of the origin of language has a clear turn in the new century, and the relevant research is more comprehensive, systematic and scientific. The common presupposition of language origin hypothesis defines language from the communicative function of language. Some hypotheses overlap in essence. Although the hypothesis of language origin lacks empirical materials, it has certain research reference value. There are two opposites in the study of the language origin, one is the opposition between the One-source theory and the Multi-source theory, the other is the opposition between the Gradualism and the Mutationism. The origin of language has its necessity and scientificity to become an academic issue. The origin of language has distinct interdisciplinary research nature, and the new research platform for the origin of language is evolutionary linguistics. In the future research on the origin of language, academic circles should establish a high degree of problem awareness, in addition to strengthening interdisciplinary cooperation, and constantly consolidate the latest research position of evolutionary linguistics.*

Keywords: *Language Origin, Connotation, Research Process, Hypothesis, Opposites*

1. Introduction

For a long time, the issue of the origin of language has been controversial. Even in today's highly developed science and technology, the issue of the origin of language has not been solved in a real sense, and the academic circle has a long way to go to explore the issue of the origin of language. This paper first analyzes the basic connotation of language origin, then combs the research process of language origin, and summarizes various hypotheses of language origin. Next, it briefly explains the two oppositions in the research process of language origin. Finally, it puts forward some prospects on the issue of language origin. This paper aims to clarify the related problems and research results in the process of exploring the origin of language, and tries to show the research status and development trend of the origin of language, so as to provide enlightenment and reference for future research on the origin of language.

2. The Basic Connotation of Language Origin

Obviously, clarifying the basic connotation of language origin is the premise of discussing and studying issues related to language origin. There are usually two understandings of the origin of language. One refers to the origin of a specific language, and the other is the origin of human general language.

It should be pointed out that the core issue discussed in this paper is the origin of human general language. The origin of human language mainly refers to how human beings created language in the historical process and how human beings began to use language as a communicative tool. Therefore, clarifying the basic connotation of language origin is based on linguistics but cannot be limited to linguistics. Anthropology and philosophy are also closely related to it. If we start from linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, then the basic connotation of language origin includes: Definition of language, The conditions of language origin, The conditions of language origin, The specific process of language origin. In addition, the relationship between the origin of language and the initial naming of

things cannot be ignored. The basic connotations of language origin are interrelated, and the definition of language is fundamental.

3. Research Process on the Language Origin

The study of the origin of language goes on and on. Compared with the study before the 21st century, the study of the language origin since the 21st century has a clear turn and shows distinctive characteristics. The development of science and technology has promoted the study of language origin, and more and more scientific and technological achievements have been applied to the study of language origin.

3.1. Before the 21st Century

The origin of language was originally attached to the philosophical question of human nature, which only aroused the interest of a few philosophers. People couldn't make a clear explanation of the origin of language at that time, and only pointed the answer to religious culture such as theocracy. In Europe before the 17th century, Christian theology attributed the occurrence of language to God in an unshakable position.

In the 18th century, the origin of language became the main research topic of philosophy. In addition, some linguists began to pay active attention to it. With the progress of natural science, people focus more on their own rationality and creativity, trying to explain that language originates from human self-creation. In 1769, the Royal Academy of Sciences of Prussia first sought the best answer to the question of the origin of language, which attracted a large number of scholars in various fields. After a century of development, the study of the origin of language ushered in the first peak, a variety of language origin hypothesis and assumption theory came into being, but due to difficulties in obtaining evidence and other reasons, the theory of language origin is mostly conjecture and speculation.

In the 1960s, some people began to doubt or even deny the research value of the origin of language because of the lack of substantive research results. In 1866, the Paris Society of Linguistics clearly stipulated that the articles on the origin of language and related discussions were no longer accepted. Which believed that the exploration of the origin of language was not enough to become a legitimate scientific research. The Paris Society of Linguistics, as an authoritative institution in the linguistic field at that time, reiterated this position again in 1901. The provisions of the Paris Society of Linguistics directly led to the origin of language as a scientific research forbidden area.

In the 1970s, with the great development of cognitive science, the research field of vision, research means and research methods have changed a lot. Many scholars have regained their interest in the study of language origin and promoted the study of language origin to a new agenda. In 1972, the first North American Conference on the Origin and Development of Languages was held in Toronto, marking the break of the forbidden zone for the study of language origin. In 1975, a landmark symposium in the history of contemporary language origin and evolution was held in New York. In 1983, The International Society for the Study of the Origins and Evolution of Language was established in Vancouver, Canada[1]. The issue of language origin has gradually entered a new peak in a research boom.

3.2. Since the 21st Century

Since the beginning of the new century, the Evolutionary Linguistics formed in the late last century has become the main platform for the study of language origin. The study of language origin has been carried out comprehensively and systematically. Evolutionary linguistics combines the existing research results of human language with the concept of evolution, and develops new ideas and methods. It is not only the inheritance of language origin research, but also its in-depth development and innovation.[2]

In recent years, the development of evolutionary linguistics in the world is in full swing, and it has become a hot research topic in the international academic circles. Experts and scholars in various fields collaborate to explore the origin of language from different angles. Emerging theories and methods have made corresponding research results, and academic circles have unprecedented confidence in revealing the scientific laws of language origin.

On the exploration of the origin of language, it has spanned several centuries from the initial language divinity to various hypotheses of the origin of language, and then to the modern and contemporary theoretical system derived from the basis of scientific cognition. The origin of language has also changed from a single philosophical research object to an interdisciplinary research object. The exploration of the origin of language is more comprehensive, systematic and scientific.

4. Hypothesis on the Language Origin

There are various hypotheses about the origin of language, such as The Bow-Wow Theory, The Pooh-Pooh Theory, The Yo-He-Ho Theory, The Simulacrum Theory, The Evolution Theory, The Labor Theory, The Doctrine of social contract, The Human Root theory, The Gesture Origin Theory, The Music Origin Theory, The Perceptual Origin Theory, and the earliest Language Divine Origin Theory.

4.1. The content of the Hypothesis

The Bow-Wow Theory says that the original human language is the imitation of natural sound. The Pooh-Pooh Theory says that language is transformed from the sound of joy, anger and sorrow that human instincts make. The Yo-He-Ho says that language originates from the slogans issued by people to improve efficiency in order to coordinate actions in the process of collective labor. The Simulacrum Theory attributes the origin of language to the simulation of natural objects through human organs. The Evolution Theory asserts that the origin of language is accompanied by human evolution. The Labor Theory advocates that language is generated from and with labor due to communication needs. The Doctrine of social contract holds that language is produced by conventions, and language is the product of people's discussion and discussion in order to solve communication barriers. The Human Root theory believes that the spontaneous process of language is the essence of human beings, and language is the image of human nature. The Gesture Origin Theory attributes the origin of language to gesture actions, and holds that human language ability is first developed by using gestures and finally evolved from sign language to sound language. The Music Origin Theory holds that language begins with the semi-musical expression describing individual or isolated events. It is the singing form of pursuing entertainment or love that contributes to the generation of language. The Perceptual Origin Theory claims that human language originates from feeling, which is produced in the process of perception.

4.2. Value Evaluation of Hypothesis

From the current language performance, the above hypothesis has its certain reasonability. Body posture, gestures and expressions are still associated with speech so far. The mimicry words in language may also be the remnants of gestures used in ancient times. Onomatopoeia can provide evidence for the Bow-Wow Theory, and exclamatory words and modal auxiliaries are evidence of the Pooh-Pooh Theory. A variety of labor signs are also seen everywhere today. Various hypotheses understand some of the questions about the origin of language from different perspectives. Language originates from the copying of natural sounds, from the transformation of emotional sounds, from the solidification of labor signs, from the simulation of related objects, from the expression of music sounds, from the meaning of gestures and actions, and from the spontaneousness of human spirit. These are answers to what language originates. Language originates from social contracts, from communicative needs, from labor processes, from emotional ups and downs, from sensory experience, from entertainment needs, and from help-seeking needs. These are the answers to the conditions for language. It is not difficult to see that the language origin hypothesis has certain reference value.

In fact, although some language origin hypotheses have different names, they overlap in essence, such as The Gesture Origin Theory and The Posture Origin Theory, The Pooh-Pooh Theory and The Music Origin Theory. In general, there is a lack of convincing empirical material for these hypotheses, and cannot accurately explain the origin of human language. When making value judgments on these hypotheses about the origin of language, the origin of language should not be equated with the origin of sounded language, and the language in the hypothesis should be understood as a way of communication, because the common presupposition of the hypothesis about the origin of language tends to define language from communicative function.

5. Two Opposites in the Study of Language Origin

There has been no breakthrough in the study of language origin for a long time. The main reason is that it is difficult to obtain evidence, resulting in great difficulty in its own verifiability. Researchers don't dare to easily make a conclusion about the origin of language. They often choose some aspect of the origin of language to try to demonstrate and draw a new explanation or theory, in order to infinitely approach the best answer to this problem. With the continuous exploration of the origin of language in academic circles, two oppositions about the study of the origin of language have gradually formed, one is the opposition between the One-source theory and the Multi-source theory, the other is the opposition between the Gradualism and the Mutationism.

5.1. *The One-Source Theory and the Multi-Source Theory*

There is a opposition between the One-source theory and the Multi-source theory on the origin of language. The One-source theory believes that there is only one source of human language, and the differences in various languages in the world are the result of the gradual evolution and differentiation of the same language. The Multi-source theory holds that the origin of language is more than one, and languages in the world have many origins.

The idea of the One-source theory is implied in many scholars' works. They believe that all languages in the world have a common ancestor. In the Enlightenment period, the One-source theory was widely popular in the western world, which was mainly reflected in the speculation about the ancestors of human language. In his book *Die Speechen des Pradieses*, the Swedish soldier Andreas Kempe made it clear that Swedish was the starting point of human language. John Webb put forward in *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language that Chinese is the earliest language of human surprise*. In *On the Origin and Progress of Language*, James Burnett tries to infer from the same ancestor language through the type characteristics of different languages. British judge William Jones in India infers that Sanskrit is similar to Greek and Latin because they come from an earlier source, which also tends to human language monogenesis. Wang Gang, a Chinese scholar, has made it clear that advancing on the basis of the study of the relationship between languages can prove that human language is derived from one source. In his view, the theory of one source of language is closely related to the theory of one source of human beings. If human beings are derived from one source, then language is naturally derived from one source.[3] Based on a survey of human genetic genes, biologists infer that human ancestors are likely to be a small group of people living in Africa about 200,000 years ago. If this is consistent with historical facts, according to Wang Gang, the natural language of this group is the root of human language.

According to the multi-source theory' supporters, language is invented by different groups in several parts of the world. China's Ma Yi asserts that human languages cannot all originate in a particular time, place and group. He believes that the view that languages originate in a place is untenable. He further speculates that in the early stages of language formation, languages must be much more diverse than they are now. Different languages, and even different dialects of the same language, are formed at the beginning, and then with the division and integration of tribes and societies, languages are also differentiated or mixed and integrated.[4] Some linguists think that language is profound and complex, and it needs a lot of coincidence to invent language once, let alone several inventions. Chinese scholar Wang Shiyuan and Ke Jinyun think that idea has a basic error, because the complexity of language is the result of its continuous evolution, and it can be proved by probability model that the possibility of the multi-source theory will be greater than that of the One-source theory. They believe that the origin of language is multi-source, and language is independent from several different places.[5] On the Human Origin of Africa Hypothesis Related to Two Time-levels and its Etymological Relation, Chen Baoya pointed out that human beings cannot deduce that language originated from Africa twice out of Africa, and the final conclusion is that the multi-source theory of language origin is more likely.[6]

The One-source theory and the multi-source theory of language origin are still hypothetical theories, which can not be proved at present, but can't be denied. Although the standpoint is different, the academic circles basically reach a consensus: the argument ideas and methods of the One-source theory and the multi-source theory are basically consistent, that is, to study the kinship between the existing languages in the world, and to construct the primitive ancestral language by comparing various languages. In the process of finding evidence, historical comparative linguists divide language to establish language pedigree, but find it difficult to find the earliest primitive mother tongue of all

languages. Therefore, a considerable number of linguists tend to believe that there are multiple sources of language, and many languages in the world are differentiated and evolved by multiple primitive ancestors. But the study of language genetic relationship is largely subject to the researchers' own cognitive level and knowledge reserves. Languages that are included in the same language family are those that have sufficient evidence to confirm that they are from the same source and therefore have genetic relationship with each other, while languages that are included in different language families can only be said to have not found such evidence. Therefore, it is still a mystery whether human language originates from one language or multiple languages.

However, the argument process of the One-source theory and the multi-source theory of language origin is more objective and scientific, and researchers try to find more empirical materials to support their views. In the course of its argument, a series of research results on the language origin broaden the field of vision to explore the origin of language, such as Eve Hypothesis, Ultra-Language Family and other theories, to some extent inspired people to have a deeper understanding of the origin of language.

5.2. The Gradualism and the Mutationism

Influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, some scholars have used the Gradualism and the Mutationism. to explain the origin and evolution of language on the basis of existing research. There is an obvious opposition between the two research viewpoints. The Gradualism believes that language begins with the evolution of human beings and gradually matures through the natural selection of various cognitive abilities. According to the Mutationism, the ability of language is a kind of ability which appears rapidly due to gene mutation in the later period with the enlargement of the brain. In other words, human primitive language may be caused by a certain gene mutation in the brain tissue structure of an individual in the human ancestor, or may be a byproduct of other changes[7].

Gradualists approve that language cannot suddenly form its final form, which must be evolved from the early pre-linguistic system of human primate ancestors. Herder considers that man had language when he was still an animal[8], This view indirectly indicates that human language evolved from animal language. Language has the continuity of development and contains the idea of gradualism.

Darwin believes that language is evolved from some natural voices expressing emotions. Language develops slowly, unconsciously and through many steps. It can be seen that Darwin directly combines the origin of language with the origin of species, and explains the generation and development of language with gradualism. Schleicher believes that language, as a natural organism, grows up according to certain laws, develops continuously, gradually aging, and finally leads to death[9]. It can be seen that in Schleicher's idea, the historical occurrence and development of language must experience the general laws of gradual evolution, natural selection and survival of the fittest. Steven Pinker also insisted on gradualism that language instinct evolved in a general way, Language is an adaptive function formed by human beings through natural selection.[10] It is constantly regenerated and optimized. Language is evolving like hands, eyes and other organs.

Saltationists accept a part of the basic idea of evolutionism, but do not agree with the role of natural selection. They believe that the occurrence of language is the result of mutation rather than a gradual process, and its essence is gene mutation. Humboldt believes that the improvement of language is naturally gradual, but the invention of language can only be made by one move, which shows that Humboldt holds the concept of language origin mutation. Chomsky has always adhered to the theory of language mutation, and he believes that language is suddenly appeared[11]. Who further points out that a random mutation generated by an individual leads to the emergence of language in a perfect or nearly perfect form.[12] In fact, Chomsky firmly believes that a discontinuous gene mutation leads to the generation of Language Faculty, which is an effective combination of individual selection theory, gene selection theory and modern genetic mutation theory.[13] This has also become another theoretical basis for the origin and generation of language in biological linguistics. Bickerton believes that language does not proceed slowly and smoothly, and human beings only accidentally enter the territory of language. He finds the most sufficient reason to support the theory of mutation. First, the existing evidence proves that human cognition is a mutation. Second, it has not yet found a variety of intermediary languages and some stable stages between the original language and human language at the same time, so language in the full sense is naturally the result of mutation.[14]

The Gradualism and the Mutationism aim to explain the origin and evolution of language. In fact, their starting points are different. The Gradualism regards language as a dynamic process to study, while the Mutationism tends to regard language as a static result to study. In recent years, some

scholars believe that there is no fundamental opposition between the two theories. Yang Liexiang and Wu Yaqing believe that the generation and evolution of language have both gradual factors and sudden factors, and they are sudden changes in gradual changes. The co-evolution of gradual and sudden changes in language conforms to modern system theory and cybernetics, and it transcends the binary opposition between externalism and inner attention in the study of language evolution[15].

6. Several Prospects Based on the Study of the Origin of Language

Based on the study of the origin of language in the aspects of basic connotation, exploration process, relevant hypothesis and opposite perspective, this paper hopes to put forward thinking and prospect from three dimensions of cognition, analysis and solution of the origin of language.

6.1. The Problematic Consciousness of Language Origin

Spoken language is primary. To explore the origin of human initial language, evidence collection seems to be an insurmountable problem, which makes people doubt the necessity and scientificity of language origin as an academic issue. Rousseau had a pessimistic attitude towards this issue, and he believed that the academic circle would not have much results on the origin of language. After all, people are far from the beginning of language. Saussure focuses on the spirit of positivism. He believes that the question of the origin of language is not as important as people generally think, and it is not even a question worth raising. Even in the new century, some scholars are skeptical about the origin of language as an academic issue. Gao Yu believes that the origin of language is a more remote issue than the origin of art. The existing language materials cannot be traced back to the occurrence period of language. The origin of language is an issue that cannot be discussed clearly, and it is doubtful as an academic issue[16].

It is self-evident that it is difficult to demonstrate the origin of language. Up to now, most of the views and conclusions drawn from the research on the origin of language lack empirical materials and basic public opinions. However, this does not deny the value of language origin as an academic issue, and there is no recognized answer for the moment, which does not mean that this issue cannot be solved in the future. From the perspective of the development of academic research on the origin of language, many scholars attach great importance to this scientific problem. Combined with various research methods, people are constantly exploring at all levels of the origin of language.

To achieve the true understanding of the origin of language, academia must establish a strong sense of problem, that is, the problematization of language origin. The problematization of problem is to academicize the problems found. The so-called academicization is to put the problems found into a certain subject system, apply appropriate research methods, and obtain certain academic achievements.[17] The origin of language, as a major topic of explanatory linguistics, its important position can't be ignored. The origin of language is related to the origin of human beings, and language has a clear social attribute. These show that the study of language origin can be academically radiated to relevant disciplines, and the solution to the problem of language origin must also be able to feed back the solution of anthropological and sociological problems. Therefore, the origin of language has its necessity and scientificity to become an academic research issue.

6.2. Nature of Interdisciplinary Research of Language Origin

The origin of language was only a philosophical issue at first, and then entered the field of linguistic research. Up to now, the origin of language has become a scientific issue of common concern in many disciplines. The origin of language has a distinct interdisciplinary research nature. In addition to linguistics and philosophy, the solution of this problem requires the active participation of anthropology, ethnology, sociology, culturology, archaeology, anatomy, psychology, clinical medicine, cognitive science, biometrical genetics, neurophysiology and many other disciplines.

The interdisciplinary research nature of language origin determines that interdisciplinary cooperation is bound to be the development trend of its future research, which will continue to solve the problem of language origin in a real sense. In addition, the origin of language is no longer limited to when, where, and what the origin of language is. Instead, it attempts to make a scientific empirical and explanation of one aspect of the origin of language in combination with relevant research results in various fields. For example, the discovery of FOXP2 language genes and the establishment of modern human gene bank have laid the foundation for revealing the whole picture of the origin of language. As

life science has gradually become a frontier discipline in the twenty-first century, people's understanding of the biological mechanism of language is deepening. Under the premise of interdisciplinary cooperation, scholars in related fields work together, with existing experience and evidence, using advanced science and technology, in the process of verifying the existing theoretical hypothesis, the origin of language will be able to get a relatively comprehensive scientific answer.

6.3. A new Platform for Exploring the Origin of Language

The study of language origin has spawned the emergence of evolutionary linguistics. On the contrary, evolutionary linguistics provides the latest platform for the study of language origin. Evolutionary linguistics focuses on the origin and evolution of language, pays attention to interdisciplinary cooperation, and emphasizes the fundamental position of linguistics in research orientation[18]. Looking back on history, based on the present situation and focusing on the future is the basic idea of evolutionary linguistics[19]. In recent years, evolutionary linguistics has started from different disciplines to explore the physiological, neural and cognitive basis of the origin and development of language, the genetic basis of language ability, the evolution mechanism of language elements, and the generation path of language lineages. Scientific methods such as modeling and simulation have been widely used, and many unprecedented achievements have been obtained. They have made great strides in exploring the fundamental problem of language origin.

It has been proved that evolutionary linguistics provides a new platform for the study of language origin. It is necessary to focus on this discipline, invest more resources to strengthen its construction, and constantly improve its discipline system. Relevant researchers should be used to communicating and cooperating with peers in different disciplines, learn new concepts and methods, and make new achievements to promote the continuous progress of evolutionary linguistics. The future solution to the problem of language origin depends largely on the development of evolutionary linguistics, which will become the most solid position for the study of language origin.

7. Conclusions

The origin of language as a worldwide problem still needs to be explored. Based on previous studies, this paper discusses the origin of human general language. From the perspectives of linguistics, anthropology and philosophy, the basic connotation of language origin includes the definition of language, the conditions of language origin, the specific process of language origin, and the relationship between language origin and naming of things. From the initial divine origin theory to various hypotheses of language origin in modern times to the theoretical system derived from scientific cognition in modern and contemporary times, the research on the origin of language has spanned several centuries. The origin of language has also become a hot topic of multidisciplinary attention from a single philosophical research object. People try to continue to explore the mystery of language origin at a more comprehensive, systematic and scientific level. There are many hypothesizes of language origin that lack empirical evidence in the academic field, and the contents of these hypothesizes overlap. These hypothesizes focus on defining language from the communicative function of language. Although the hypothesis of language origin cannot accurately explain the origin of human language, it can provide reference for the study of language origin. The opposition between the One-source theory and the Multi-source theory, the opposition between the Gradualism and the Mutationism are two oppositions in the study of language origin, whose essence is to explain the origin and development of language. The origin of language has its necessity and scientificity to become a formal academic issue. In the future research on the origin of language, the academic circle should establish a high degree of problem consciousness. The origin of language has a distinct nature of interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary cooperation is the development trend of language origin research. The question of the origin of language is expected to be scientifically answered with the cooperation of experts and scholars in related fields. Emerging evolutionary linguistics provides a new perspective and a new platform for the study of language origin. It is necessary to invest a lot of resources to construct and improve the discipline system of evolutionary linguistics, and continuously consolidate this latest research position.

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