

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed Charles Taylor's piece 'The origin of language'.¹ However, I would like to take gentle issue with the implication that Adam's ability to speak and understand immediately can be taken as support for the 'language is innate' school of thought over against the *tabula rasa* idea (our minds are a blank sheet on which our social environment impresses language).

I certainly do believe that the observational evidence concerning people today strongly favours the view, over against the 'blank sheet' theories, that we are indeed innately 'hard wired' with the capability to acquire fully-blown language — be it Chinese, English, or sign language. To use (imperfectly) a modern-day analogy — we have the hardware, and the already set-up programming software, from birth. However, we need input from the environment (including the language of other people) in order to properly 'programme' the software (or 'burn onto the chip', if you like).

However, in Adam's case, there was no time for the environment to programme the machinery. Adam (and Eve, presumably) had to not only have the hardware, but the fully programmed software of an actual language. They would have had to innately know what God meant by the words 'if you eat of the fruit thereof, dying, you will surely die' without ever having experienced death, for example.

Since such total pre-programming was a miraculous event, one which does not occur today, it seems unrelated to either of the theories of how we **currently** acquire language. Whether 'blank sheet' or 'innate' theories were correct, God would still have had to do some miraculous creation of language programmes in the case of our first parents, who would have to have had built into them what it takes any of us years of experience to acquire

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nowadays.

As an aside, this may be relevant to the issue of Adam naming the animals. Since Adam had the meanings of various words already pre-programmed into the language capacities God gave him, perhaps this included pre-programmed animal names in whatever language it was that God chose to imbue him with. Thus, it may be that the naming procedure did not require pondering creatively, but simply an instant dip into the 'neural archives' to make the first-time connection between the already stored name and the initial visual contact with the item being named.

Carl Wieland,
Brisbane,
AUSTRALIA.

REFERENCE

1. Taylor, C. V, 1997. *The origin of language*. CEN Tech. J., 11(1):76-81.

The Author replies ...

As I understand it, Carl Wieland's point is that we cannot extrapolate Adam's linguistic gift to the present day without modification. His thesis is that Adam and to some extent Eve would be special cases. In this I agree.

However, I still maintain that the linguistic gift in today's people is a miraculous endowment deriving from Adam's 'gift'. Some form of inheritance would ensure a species-specific genetic element, though to what extent it is 'mental' might be a matter for argument.

Chomsky, though an unbeliever, used the word 'miraculous' in connection with the present-day ability of young children, since he would probably not accept a literal Adam and Eve. In that sense, the origin of language must have been God-given and not merely acquired through history. That is the point.

If it is miraculous today, activated by the environment, what must it have been at the point of origin? A parrot can imitate environmental sounds, but it does not apply to it a ready grammar, as does the human child at a remarkably young age.

Charles V. Taylor,
Gosford,
AUSTRALIA.

THE PRE-FLOOD/FLOOD BOUNDARY

Dear Editor,

In reply to Woodmorappe's letter¹ regarding my paper, 'Is the pre-Flood/Flood boundary in the Earth's mantle?'²

Woodmorappe notes correctly that I claim that prior to 1991 creationists had fixed the pre-Flood/Flood boundary (not the Flood/post-Flood boundary as printed) at the base of the Cambrian. At the time I was not familiar with Woodmorappe's work³ in which he included Precambrian biotas within the Flood, and in hindsight, it was unwise of me to make that claim, especially as in the next paragraph I noted that in 1983 Snelling⁴ suggested that, because of their fossil stromatolite content, some of the Precambrian strata should be considered as Flood rocks.

Woodmorappe, in common with some other creationists, uses the following logic in assigning some of the Precambrian as Flood rocks and some as pre-Flood:

Those Precambrian strata which do contain fossils are undoubtedly Flood sediments, but the vast majority of Precambrian strata is unfossiliferous, and can still be assigned to the pre-Flood'

In my opinion this argument is based on three unstated, *a priori* assumptions:

- (1) there is an identifiable pre-Flood/Flood boundary in the **observable**