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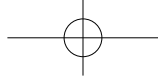
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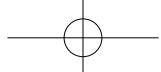
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UNIT

1

Language



I Origins

A | *According to myths*

- Human beings are by nature curious, especially about things related to how, when and where our ancestors came into being. This curiosity leads to inquiries into how language originated. Most religions and mythologies contain stories of language origin.

Summarizing the main ideas of myths

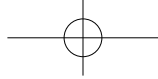
Reading & speaking

You are going to read two passages (Pages 3 & 4). Each contains descriptions of three widely known myths about the origins of language and why languages are so diverse. Work in pairs, and do the following tasks.

- Each student reads one passage, and fills in the table by answering the following questions.
 - Who/What caused the emergence and/or diversification of language? (Note: Indicate whether it is emergence or diversification or both that is caused according to each of the myths you have read.)
 - How did the language originate and/or become diversified?
 - Why did the language originate and/or become diversified?

Culture	Who/What	How	Why
Hebrew			
Hindu			
Native American			
European			
East African			
Aboriginal Australian			

- Based on what you have noted down in the table, prepare a two-minute talk on the myths about the origin of language and/or language diversity as explained in the passages. Note that your talk should include all the three types of information you have filled in the table.
- In pairs, give the talk you have prepared. When listening to your partner, fill in the blank parts of your table. Ask your partner to clarify, confirm or explain when you are not sure about what he or she says.
- Suppose you are invited to give a talk about the evolution of language to a group of English learners. To arouse the audience's interest in your talk, you decide to begin with some myths about the origin of language and language diversity. Now in groups of three or four, discuss what to include in the beginning part of your talk based on the information in the table you have filled in, and present it in the class. Limit your presentation to five minutes.



Passage A

1 Without the gift of speech, the human species would probably have to resort to basic animal instinct in order to communicate and survive. According to scientific studies, human's capacity to produce spoken words is mostly attributed to our very large brains. However, an assessment of the many myths surrounding the origin of language as well as how different languages were created offers a much different perspective.

2 The Hebrew Bible attributes the origin of language *per se* to humans, with Adam being asked to name the creatures that God had created. One of the most well-known examples in the West is the Tower of Babel passage from Genesis in the Bible or Torah¹. The passage, common to the Abrahamic² faiths with the exception of Islam, tells of God punishing humanity for arrogance and disobedience by means of the confusion of tongues. And the LORD said, "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

3 In India, a Hindu myth tells of how not only differences in language, but also diversity in culture, or customs came into being, by the punishment of a proud tree, by the creator-

god Brahma³. "There grew in the centre of the earth the wonderful 'world tree', or 'knowledge tree'. It was so tall that it reached almost to heaven. It said in its heart, 'I shall hold my head in heaven and spread my branches over all the earth, and gather all men together under my shadow, and protect them, and prevent them from separating.' But Brahma, to punish the pride of the tree, cut off its branches and cast them down on the earth, when they sprang up as trees, and made differences of belief and speech and customs to prevail on the earth, to disperse men upon its surface."



4 In common with the mythologies of many other civilizations and cultures which tell of a great flood, certain native American tribes tell of a deluge which came over the earth. After the water subsides, various explanations are given for the new diversity in speech. The Aztecs⁴ story maintains that only a man, Coxcox, and a woman, Xochiquetzal, survive, having floated on a piece of

bark. They found themselves on land and begot many children who were at first born unable to speak, but subsequently, upon the arrival of a dove were endowed with language, although each one was given a different speech so that they could not understand one another. An Iroquois story tells of the god Taryenyawagon (Holder of the Heavens) guiding his people on a journey and directing them to settle in different places whence their languages changed.

1 Torah /'tɔːrə/

2 Abrahamic /,eɪbrə'hæmɪk/: related to Abraham, the founder of Hebrew people

3 Brahma /'brɑːmə/: 梵天 (印度教主神之一, 为创造之神)

4 Aztec /'æztek/: 阿兹特克人 (one of the tribes who lived in and controlled Mexico from the 14th century to the 16th century)

Passage B

1 Without the gift of speech, the human species would probably have to resort to basic animal instinct in order to communicate and survive. According to scientific studies, human's capacity to produce spoken words is mostly attributed to our very large brains. However, an assessment of the many myths surrounding the origin of language as well as how different languages were created offers a much different perspective.



how different languages came about. A god who speaks all languages is a theme among African mythology, one example being Eshu¹⁰ of the Yoruba¹¹, a trickster who is messenger of the gods. Eshu has a parallel in Legba¹² from the Fob¹³ people of Benin. Another Yoruba god who speaks all the languages of the world is Orunmila¹⁴, the god of divination.

2 In ancient Greece there was a myth which told that for ages men had lived without law under the rule of Zeus⁵ and speaking one language. The god Hermes⁶ brought diversity in speech and along with it separation into nations and discord ensued. Zeus then resigned his position, yielding it to the first king of men, Phoroneus⁷. In Norse mythology, the faculty of speech is a gift from the third son of Borr⁸, who gave also hearing and sight. When the sons of Borr were walking along the seashore, they found three trees, and took up the trees and shaped men of them: The first gave them spirit and life; the second, wit and feeling; the third, form, speech, hearing, and sight.

3 The Wa-Sania⁹, a Bantu people of East African origin, have a tale that in the beginning, the peoples of the earth knew only one language, but during a severe famine, a madness struck the people, causing them to wander in all directions, jabbering strange words, and this is

4 In Australia, an awful story of cannibalism from the people of Encounter Bay offers their explanation of the origin of language. "In remote time an old woman, named Wurruri¹⁵, lived towards the east and generally walked with a large stick in her hand, to scatter the fires around which others were sleeping. Wurruri at length died. Greatly delighted at this circumstance, they sent messengers in all directions to give notice of her death; men, women and children came, not to lament, but to show their joy. The Raminjerar were the first who fell upon the corpse and began eating the flesh, and immediately began to speak intelligibly. The other tribes to the eastward arriving later ate the contents of the intestines, which caused them to speak a language slightly different. The northern tribes came last and devoured the intestines and all that remained, and immediately spoke a language differing still more from that of the Raminjerar." Another group of Australian aboriginals, the Gunwinggu, tell of a goddess in dreamtime giving each of her children a language of their own to play with.

5 Zeus /zju:s/: the king of the gods

6 Hermes /'hɜ:mɪz/: a Greek god of commerce, travel and theft

7 Phoroneus /fə'rəʊniəs/

8 Borr /bɔ:/: a god in Norse mythology

9 Wa-Sania /wə'sæniə/

10 Eshu /ʃu:/ (Note that "e" is not pronounced)

11 Yoruba /jɒ'rɒbə/: an ethnic group of southwestern Nigeria and southern Benin in West Africa

12 Legba /'legbə/: a god of West Africa and Voodooism

13 Fob /fɒb/

14 Orunmila /,ɒrən'milə/

15 Wurruri /wɒ'rɒri/



Identifying recurring themes of myths about language diversification

Discussion

- 1 From the table you have filled in (Page 2), you may have found that different cultures tell different stories of language origin and diversification. Yet under the surface differences, there are some common central messages shared by most myths, especially those about how language became diversified. Try to identify them by answering the following questions.
 - 1) Examine the story lines of the myths about language diversification. How many types can you distinguish?
 - 2) Look more closely at the stories of each type and identify their common themes.

- 2 In groups of three, each shares his or her opinion about the type of story and the common theme. Make sure that the opinions are supported by the details of the myths. Summarize each member's opinions by filling in the table below. Each group then sends a representative to report the results of group discussion to the class. Be sure to point out the similarities and differences in the opinions of the group members.

Type	Common theme	Supporting example

Language work

1. Identifying functions of present tense in stories—discussion

- 1 You may have noticed that the events of the myths are mainly described in the past tense for the obvious reason that they occurred in the past. However, you may also have found some sentences in the present tense. Now underline all the sentences in the present tense that refer to the past time in Passages A and B, and see if you can find out any common features of this type of sentences. Note that you may do so by contrasting them with the sentences in the past tense.
- 2 In groups of four, one member of the group reports his or her findings, while other members of the groups listen, compare, and ask questions for clarification or confirmation. Be sure to illustrate the findings with examples from the passages.

2. Spotting expressions of similar or different meanings

In pairs, answer the following questions.

- 1) What are the words in the two passages that share the meaning of “speaking unclearly”?
- 2) What are the expressions in the two passages that share the meaning of “move in different directions”?
- 3) What is the difference in meaning between “tell of” (Passage A) and “tell” in definition?
- 4) What is the difference in meaning between “beget” (Passage A) and “to be born” in definition?

3. Filling in blanks

Complete the following passage using the verbs given in brackets in the appropriate tense and/or form. Try to use your new understanding about the reasons why present tense might be used in past narratives.

The traditional beliefs of the indigenous inhabitants of the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal _____ (describe) language as _____ (give) by the god Pūluga to the first man and woman at their union following a great deluge. The language given _____ (be) called *bojig-yâb*, which _____ (be) the language spoken to this day, according to their belief, by the tribe inhabiting the south and southeastern portion of middle Andaman. This language _____ (describe) by the inhabitants as the “mother tongue” from which all other dialects _____ (make).

Their beliefs _____ (hold) that even before the death of the first man, his offspring _____ (become) so numerous that their home could no longer accommodate them. At Pūluga’s bidding they _____ (furnish) with all necessary weapons, implements, and fire, and then _____ (scatter) in pairs all over the country. When this exodus _____ (occur) Pūluga _____ (provide) each party with a distinct dialect, thus _____ (explain) the diversity of language.

I Origins

B | *According to linguistic theories*

- Although it is widely held that language is what distinguishes human beings from animals, exactly how language came into being remains a controversial issue. Some cultures believe that it was created by some sort of “name-givers”, as you have read in the myths about the origin of language; while others are not so sure about that. The real answer to this question may never be found, due to the lack of direct evidence, yet by imagining what the early men did to communicate with each other, perhaps we can gain some insights into the developmental stages and creative processes necessarily involved in the invention of language.

Reflecting on the invention of human language

1. How did the early men communicate the following ideas?—group discussion

In groups of four, try to imagine how an early man might have communicated his ideas in the following situations (*Note that it was the first time they had been in such situations, and they did not have a ready-made language to rely on*). Fill the results of your discussion in the table.

Situation	Method of communication
1) When he wants to tell his family he has just seen a cuckoo in the trees.	
2) When he wants to warn his family that now there is a lion near where they live.	
3) When he wants to tell his peers that he has drunk some water from the stream.	

2. Theorizing about the origin of language—brainstorming

Based on the results of your discussion, try to speculate on the possible origins of human language. Propose as many theories as you can.

3. The theory I like best—a contest

Each group sends a member to report and explain their theories in the class. Then the whole class vote to select the theory or theories favoured by most students.



A mini-lecture on theories about language origin

Listening, note-taking & speaking

1 Find out what the following words mean before listening to a lecture.

bow-wow pooh-pooh splash slush bump grunt

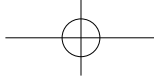
screech jaw in time drawback intelligent irrefutable

2 Listen to the lecture and complete the following table using short notes.

Name of theory	Hypothesis	Example(s)	Drawback(s)
1)			
2)			
3)			

3 In pairs, check notes with each other. Try to recall as many details as you can. Then listen to the lecture again and add details that you have missed.

4 Refer back to the results of brainstorming (Page 7) and the notes you have taken when listening to the lecture. Compare your own theories and the three hypotheses mentioned in the lecture. Then prepare a talk of about three minutes. In your talk, first describe the results of your comparison, then comment on the strengths and weaknesses of your own theories.



Language work

1. Establishing function-form relationship

Go through the transcript of the lecture (Page 31), and underline the language forms that are used in the following situations. Then check what you have found with your partner.

1) Introducing a theory	
2) Giving examples	
3) Pointing out the weakness of a theory	

2. Identifying functions of present tense in academic writing

- 1 Although the hypotheses mentioned in this lecture were all proposed in the past, present tense is frequently used, for example, when discussing what happened in the myths about the origin of language. Now further examine each hypothesis, and underline the sentences in the present tense and contrast them with the sentences in the past tense. Point out the differences in the situations where they are used.
- 2 Remember that you have done a similar exercise after reading the myths about the language origin (Page 6). Compare the two findings, and try to generalize the use of present tense in the description of past events. Then in groups of four, each presents your generalization.

Theory of language origin

Writing

Develop your brief talk about the theory of language origin into a paragraph of about 100 words. Try to follow the pattern of description adopted in the mini-lecture.



II Popularization of *putonghua*

▲ | *Standard language vs local dialects*

- ◆ As you have read in the previous section, language originated from the need for people to communicate with each other. And communication would almost be impossible if they did not speak the same tongue. One solution (perhaps the best) to this problem is that they learn to speak a common language or dialect that all of them can understand. This is exactly what is happening in China, where a large variety of dialects are spoken, and *putonghua* is the standard language designated by the government to facilitate communication.

Although popularizing *putonghua* makes communication possible between people who speak different dialects, it is not achieved without a price. Because of the government's popularization campaign, many local dialects are dying out and are slowly being replaced by *putonghua*. Since a dialect is a reflection of local culture, some people are concerned that with the disappearance of dialects, the regional culture will suffer. You will read four letters expressing different views on this issue. Before reading, try to find out what your classmates think about the same issue by doing the following survey.

Interviewing speakers with different dialects

Survey

- 1 Ask at least 10 students who can speak dialects to answer the following questions.

	Yes	No
1) Can you do without a local dialect in your daily life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Can you do without <i>putonghua</i> in your daily life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Do you agree that learning to speak <i>putonghua</i> is a personal choice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Do you care if all dialects disappear because of the compulsory use of <i>putonghua</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 2 Analyze the data you have collected and prepare a talk, which should include the following points.
 - a. The importance of local dialects in one's daily life (*This can be inferred from the*

responses to Question 1): Higher rate of "No" answers suggests greater importance of local dialects in one's daily life.)

- b. The importance of *putonghua* in one's daily life (*This can be inferred from the responses to Question 2): Higher rate of "No" answers suggests greater importance of putonghua in one's daily life.)*
 - c. Attitude towards the compulsory use of *putonghua* (*This can be inferred from the responses to Question 3): Higher rate of "Yes" answers suggests a negative attitude, while higher rate of "No" answers suggests a positive attitude.)*
 - d. Awareness of the value of local dialects (*This can be inferred from the responses to Question 4): Higher rate of "Yes" answers suggests a greater awareness.)*
- 3 In groups of four, each reports the findings of the survey. Then based on the summary of the survey findings, the group tries to infer (1) the current situation of dialect use in China, (2) the public's attitude towards the compulsory use of *putonghua*, and (3) the public's awareness of the value of local dialects.
 - 4 Each group sends a member to report the conclusions to the class.

Should the use of *putonghua* be made compulsory?

1. Getting main ideas—skimming

Go over all the four letters (Pages 11–13) quickly and answer the two questions below.

- 1) Which of the letters are for adopting *putonghua* as a unified language in China? Which are against it?
- 2) Which letter is Su Yinda's? Which ones are written in response to it?

Letter A

Dear editor,

Contrary to what Mr Su (*China Daily*, Nov. 8) expounds, the compulsory use of *putonghua* should be increased, particularly in the educational sector (beginning at the primary level), and throughout all regions of China.

To begin with, it cannot be denied that China will have a more dominant international trade position in the near future. We cannot expect foreign investors to learn and acquire expertise in regional dialects. Having one national language, in which proficiency is acquired at an early age, will greatly benefit our interests in providing a linguistically friendly environment (traditionally a huge barrier to foreign investment) for future global cooperation and enterprise.

Secondly, a common language can help to decrease misunderstanding and fragmentation in the large and diverse population of the country. As a Guangdong resident, I often hear Cantonese being spoken to those who are from other provinces in an attempt to intimidate or trick the newcomer. This creates, as it has for many years, a feeling of general hostility, both on the part of Cantonese to those “northerners” who have not learned their beautiful language, and the “northerners” who feel pressured and belittled by the locals. This situation occurs wherever there is a strong dialect. The effect of encouraging dialects over a national language is a dangerous kind of regionalism. When we all speak the same tongue, we feel equal and we feel we all belong to the nation as a whole; we are less likely to discriminate against one's dialect, and can share all of our unique cultures.

Lastly, I do not agree that the compulsory use of *putonghua* in education means the “out-phasing” and “death” of dialects. To prove my point that dialects survive I offer an example (though there are many). In France, a country with a thousand years of centralized language planning and forced conformity, there remain many dialects, the most common of which, *Provençal*, though not allowed to be used in the schools, still produces its own literature. Although it is possible that some Chinese dialects will suffer, it is true that the major groups will survive. The advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

Guangzhou, Guangdong

Letter B

Dear editor,

I feel bound to put pen to paper in reply to Su Yinda's letter of November 8th—regarding the use of *putonghua* alongside the different dialects across China—as it really made my blood boil. It seems to be suggesting that the best course of action, at present, would be to do nothing, sit patiently and let things take their “natural” course. This is patently absurd and indeed rather worrying, as the letter appears to be written from someone with an “inside” view of the education system.

Let us get a few things straight. The compulsory use of *putonghua* is desirable—and indeed Su Yinda makes that very point. Without it there cannot be a guarantee of mutual intelligibility across the nation and indeed national consciousness would suffer accordingly. Equally, no one is suggesting that it should replace existing dialects in their local contexts, rather work alongside them. Nor is it going to mean any significant loss of any particular “subculture” in the foreseeable future, as far as I can see (and I agree with X from Guangdong here) as these dialects appear to be thriving, in spite of *putonghua*'s unifying preeminence. One of the most developed regions economically is the south of Guangdong; one of the most developed cities is Shanghai. It is perfectly feasible for both systems to run alongside each other, without any loss or confrontation.

It is true that there is no actual linguistic justification for any one standard language or dialect to be chosen over any other, but that is not to say that one single form, once well-established and widely used, should not be actively promoted and encouraged. It is plainly naive to suggest that we in China should just sit back and watch the process “evolve” when, in every other great civilization in the ascendancy, governments have actively intervened in education to foster a sense of national unity through the establishment and promulgation of a standard language.

Let's standardize our language together as we continue to build up our modernized country, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the history and diversity from which we all come.

Beijing

Letter C

Dear editor,

At the beginning of each new school year, we teachers find it difficult to make ourselves fully understood by quite a number of our students when we speak *putonghua* in class. These are first-year college students, who mostly come from small towns or rural areas. When asked to answer questions in class they cannot express themselves well in *putonghua* and some revert to their own vernacular.

We have discovered that dialects have been dominating classrooms in many schools, especially in rural areas. Some teachers tell us that their *putonghua* is so poor that they are ashamed of

themselves when they speak it; others say fewer students will be able to enter higher schools if lessons are given in *putonghua* for it is dialects not *putonghua* that they like and understand.

I am worried about this situation. The forming of a common language, especially when people speaking different dialects often find it difficult to understand each other, is necessary for both economic development and national unity of our country, and it benefits all members of our society. Using dialects as the language of instruction in schools means that the students will suffer when they go to universities or looking for jobs outside of their hometown, for they will be ill-equipped for argument with their peers at university and for competition in the job market. If we do not encourage the systematic and widespread adoption of *putonghua* nationally at all levels of education, individuals from rural areas will be held back further from enjoying the undoubted benefits of national mobility our present system affords.

Putonghua should be the only instrument of communication throughout our whole education. Children should begin to learn *putonghua* in kindergarten. Since it is impossible for all teachers to be qualified for their work at present, we suggest that short-term government-sponsored training courses be provided for those whose *putonghua* is inadequate. In future, teachers should be examined in *putonghua* before they are qualified to give lessons.

Shantou, Guangdong

Letter D

Dear editor,

The compulsory use of *putonghua* (standard spoken Chinese) inside the classroom is certainly desirable for obvious reasons, but this should not be done at the expense of the numerous dialects spoken across the country.

Dialects exist for various reasons. One would be the fact that they reflect the diversity of culture in a society. Careful observations reveal a close association of one dialect with one specific subculture.

Any modern linguistic textbook would tell you that there is no linguistic justification for the establishment of a standard language or a dialect. In other words, one dialect is just as good as any other. The implication of this is that the choice of one dialect as the standard medium of education is more or less arbitrary and the subsequent discrimination against those using their native dialects is just unfair.

It is my own experience, and possibly many others', that if a dialect-speaking student comes to a university or college where only *putonghua* is used in class, he or she will sooner or later begin to learn it out of necessity, not out of compulsion. So we'd better let things run their own course. Language planning, like the popularization of *putonghua*, is a complicated process and calls for linguistic expertise. What one needs is patience and analysis.

Beijing

2. Reading for opinions

Read the letters again to compare the differing views of the letters. Decide which letter takes which view on the various points below. Fill in the blank after each statement with A, B, C or D referring to the letter that takes the stated view. Note that sometimes in one blank you may have more than one letter, and sometimes you may have none.

- 1) Setting up *putonghua* as a standard language in education may do harm to the survival of some local dialects,
 - a. but it is worthwhile to do so. _____
 - b. and so we have to be very cautious. _____
 - c. because this will endanger subcultures related to dialects. _____
 - d. but the harm will not be serious. _____
- 2) Spreading *putonghua* to the whole nation is necessary
 - a. for the economic development of the country. _____
 - b. for preventing regionalism. _____
 - c. for unifying people with diverse cultural backgrounds. _____
 - d. for effective communication. _____
- 3) Setting up *putonghua* as a standard language
 - a. is necessary but not justifiable. _____
 - b. is both necessary and justifiable. _____
- 4) The process of spreading *putonghua* throughout the whole country
 - a. should be left to run its own course and involve no compulsion. _____
 - b. should be enforced and speeded up with more efforts. _____
- 5) The use of *putonghua* in schools
 - a. should be made compulsory. _____
 - b. should not be made compulsory. _____
 - c. should be encouraged with more efforts. _____

3. Summing up views

Look back and you will notice that for the points on the left side of this page, 1) concerns the possible harm that popularization of *putonghua* will do to local dialects, 2) and 3) concern whether *putonghua* should be set up as a standard language, and 4) and 5) concern how the popularization of *putonghua* should be carried out. Now sum up the various views of the letters on the three issues, and then draw your own conclusions on (1) the general attitude towards the popularization of *putonghua* and (2) the awareness of the value of local dialects as reflected in the four letters.

4. Group discussion

In groups of four, each reports the summary of views and the conclusions drawn from the summary.



Language work

1. Identifying function-form relationship

- 1 Find expressions in Letters A and B that show the writers' disagreement with Su Yinda's view.
- 2 Find expressions in Letter B that show the writer's intense emotions against Su Yinda's view.
- 3 The following two sentences both contain the structure "it is true that...". Are they similar in meaning? How do you know?

Sentence 1: *Although it is possible that some Chinese dialects will suffer, it is true that the major groups will survive.* (Letter A)

Sentence 2: *It is true that there is no actual linguistic justification for any one standard language or dialect to be chosen over any other, but that is not to say that one single form, once well-established and widely used, should not be actively promoted and encouraged.* (Letter B)

2. English-Chinese translation

Translate the following sentences into Chinese, paying particular attention to the underlined parts, which illustrate the use of special structures in English.

- 1) *It is plainly naive to suggest that we in China should just sit back and watch the process "evolve" when, in every other great civilization in the ascendancy, governments have actively intervened in education to foster a sense of national unity through the establishment and promulgation of a standard language.* (Letter B)

- 2) *Careful observations reveal a close association of one dialect with one specific subculture.* (Letter D)

3. Error identification and correction

Each of the following sentences contains grammatical errors. Try to identify and then correct them. If possible, state your reasons for the correction.

- 1) *This creates, as it has for many years, a feeling of general hostility, both on the part of Cantonese to those "northerners" who have not learned their beautiful language, and the "northerners" who feel pressured and belittled by the locals.* (Letter A)
- 2) *Equally, no one is suggesting that it should replace existing dialects in their local contexts, rather work alongside them.* (Letter B)
- 3) *Using dialects as the language of instruction in schools means that the students will suffer when they go to universities or looking for jobs outside of their hometown...* (Letter C)

Survey results compared with views in the letters

Research

Compare the conclusions of your survey (Page 10) with those of the letters that criticized Su Yinda's view. How similar or different are they? Write a report describing your findings. Be sure to include the following types of information in your report: (1) the similarities/differences in conclusions, and (2) your comments on the results of comparison/contrast, with supporting evidence from your surveys and/or the letters.

II Popularization of *putonghua*

B | *Accept, reject, or withhold?—analyzing an argument*

- You may have noticed in your summary of the three letters that the writers take a critical view of Su Yinda's argument. Now you, as a reader, have the tough job of deciding which side of argument you would support. Generally, you have two options. One is to passively accept either what Su Yinda said or what his three opponents said. The other, which is more active, consists of asking questions in an effort to reach a personal decision about the worth of either side's argument. Obviously, the latter choice is what most people would opt for.

You may want to know how you can ask questions to reach a personal decision about the worth of an argument. The answer is: You have to know how to analyze an argument. Before you acquire this ability, however, you have to know how an argument is structured.

Understanding the basic structure of an argument

1. Three elements of argument structure—reading

According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, an argument is “a set of reasons that show something is true or untrue, right or wrong, etc”. If you look closely at this definition, you can find that it actually consists of three elements. The first is the “something” for discussion. The second is the judgment passed on that “something”, i.e. true/untrue or right/wrong. The third is “a set of reasons”. By convention, the first two elements are called “issue” and “conclusion” respectively. Thus, the three elements of an argument are: issue, conclusion, and reason. The following table presents the definitions of these three elements, together with illustrating examples, which are from Su Yinda's letter.

Element	Definition	Example
Issue	A question or controversy responsible for the conversation or discussion.	Should the use of <i>putonghua</i> be made compulsory?
Conclusion	The message that the speaker or writer wants us to accept.	Compulsory use of <i>putonghua</i> in schools is desirable, but it should not be done at the expense of local dialects.
Reason	Explanations or rationales for the conclusion.	1) Dialects and the associated subcultures may suffer if compulsory use of <i>putonghua</i> is pushed too far. 2) All dialects are equal. Arbitrary designation of one dialect may lead to discrimination. 3) Social needs determine whether one will learn a certain language or not.

2. Learning how to identify elements of an argument—reading & discussion

In groups of three, Student A reads the passage about how to identify issue, Student B the passage about how to identify conclusion, and Student C the passage about how to identify reasons. Then do the following tasks.

- 1 Summarize the methods suggested in the passage you have read, and then list them in the corresponding blanks in the following table.

Element	Method for identifying the element
Issue	
Conclusion	
Reasons	

- 2 Report your summary to other members of the group, who then note down the main points in the corresponding blanks of the table.
- 3 Use the summarized methods to identify the three elements of an argument in ONE of the letters that respond to Su Yinda's letter. Put what you have identified in the following table.

Element	Letter A	Letter B	Letter C
Issue			
Conclusion			
Reasons			

- 4 In the group, take turns presenting the results of your analysis of the argument. At the same time, other members of the group note down the main points in the corresponding blanks of the table.

For Student A

How to identify the issue in an argument

How does one go about determining the basic question or issue? Sometimes it is very simple: The writer or speaker will tell you what it is. Alternatively, the issue may be identified in the body of the text, usually right at the beginning, or it may even be found in the title. When the issue is explicitly stated, it will be indicated by phrases such as the following:

The question I am raising is: Why must we have speed limits on our highways?

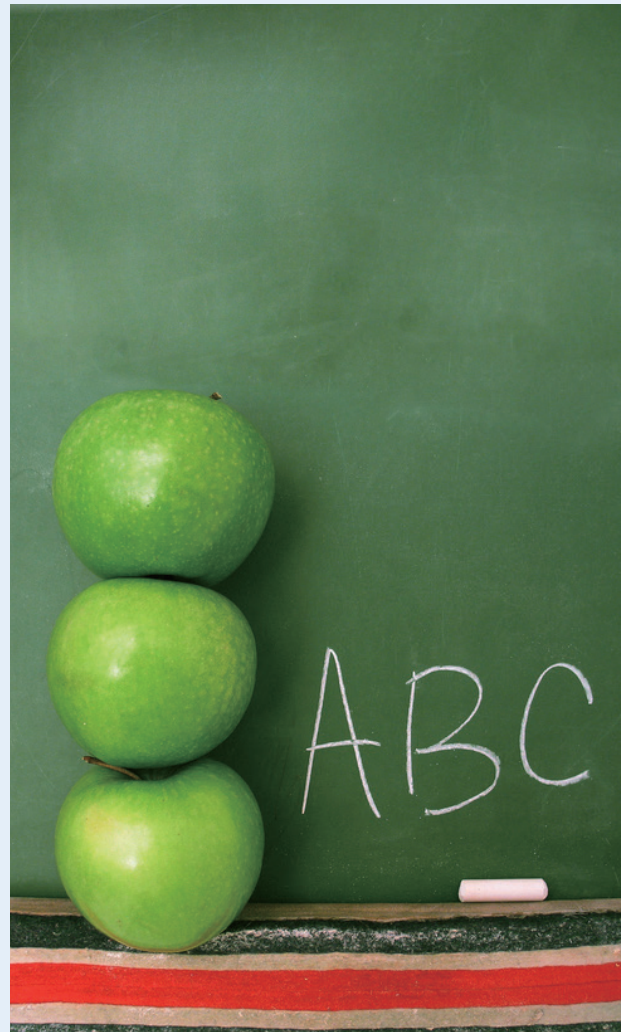
Lowering the legal drinking age: *Is it the right thing to do?*

Should sex education be taught in schools?

Unfortunately, the question is not always explicitly stated and instead must be inferred from other clues in the communication. For example, many writers or speakers are reacting to some current event that concerns them, such as a series of violent acts in schools. Asking “What is the writer reacting to?” will often suggest the central issue of a communication. Another good clue is knowledge of the writer’s background, such as organizations to which he or she belongs. So check for background information about the writer as you try to determine the issue.

When you are identifying the issue, try to resist the idea that there is one and only one correct way to state the issue. Once you have found a question that the entire essay or speech is addressing, and you can show the link between that question and the essay or speech, *you have found the issue*. Just make certain that what you are calling an issue meets the definitional

criteria for that idea. The surest way to detect an issue when it is not explicitly stated, however, is to locate the conclusion. In many cases, the conclusion must be found before you can identify the issue. Thus, in such cases, the first step in critical evaluation is to find the conclusion—a frequently difficult step.



For Student B

How to identify the conclusion of an argument

In searching for a conclusion, you will be looking for a statement or set of statements that the writer or speaker wants you to believe. He or she wants you to believe the conclusion on the basis of his or her other statements. In short, the basic structure of persuasive communication or argument is: *This* is because of *that*. *This* refers to the conclusion; *that* refers to the support for the conclusion. This structure represents the process of *inference*.

Conclusions are *inferred*; they are derived from

reasoning. Conclusions are ideas that require other ideas to support them. Thus, whenever someone claims something is true or ought to be done and provides no statements to support his or her claim, that claim is not a conclusion because no one has offered any basis for belief. And unsupported claims are what we refer to as *mere* opinions.

There are a number of clues to help you identify the conclusion, as shown in the following table.

Clue	Explanation
1. Ask what the issue is.	Because a conclusion is always a response to an issue, it will help you find the conclusion if you know the issue.
2. Look for indicator words.	The conclusion will frequently be preceded by indicator words that announce a conclusion is coming. When you see these indicator words, take note of them. A list of such indicator words are as follows: <i>consequently, suggests that, hence, therefore, points to the conclusion that, thus, the point I'm trying to make is, it follows that, it is highly probable that, shows that, proves that, indicates that, the truth of the matter is, etc.</i>
3. Look in likely locations.	Conclusions tend to occupy certain locations. The first two places to look at are the beginning and the end. If you are reading a long, complex passage and are having difficulty seeing where it is going, skip ahead to the end.
4. Remember what a conclusion is not.	Conclusions will not be any of the following: examples, statistics, definitions, background information and evidence.
5. Check the context of the communication and the writer's background.	Often writers, speakers, or Internet sites take predictable positions on issues. Knowing probable biases of the source and the background of writers can be especially valuable clues when the conclusion is not explicit.
6. Ask the question, "And therefore?"	Because conclusions are often implied, ask for the identity of the "and therefore" element. Ask, "Does the writer want us to draw an implied conclusion from the information communicated?" Conclusions like "Candidate X will be soft on crime" are often left for the reader or viewer to infer from the limited information presented in a political ad.

For Student C

How to identify reasons in an argument

Identifying reasons is a particularly important step in critical thinking. An opinion cannot be evaluated fairly unless we ask why it is held and get a satisfactory response. Focusing on reasons requires us to remain open to and tolerant of views that might differ from our own. If we reacted to conclusions rather than to reasoning, we would tend to stick to the conclusions we brought to the discussion or essay, and those conclusions that agree with our own would receive our rapid assent. If we are ever to re-examine our own opinions, we must remain curious, open to the reasons provided by those people with opinions that we do not yet share.

The first step in identifying reasons is to approach the argument with a questioning attitude, and the first question you should ask is a *why* question. You have identified the conclusion; now you wish to know why the conclusion makes sense. If a statement does not answer the question, “Why does the writer or speaker believe that?”, then it is not a reason. To function as a reason, a statement (or group of statements) must provide support for a conclusion.

One of the best ways for you to determine whether you have discovered a reason is to try to play the role of the communicator. Put yourself in his or her position and ask yourself, “Why am I in favor of this conclusion that I am supporting?” Try to put into your own words how you believe the communicator would answer this question. If you can paraphrase the answer,

you have probably discovered his or her reasons.

As you determine a communicator’s reasoning structure, you should treat any idea that seems to be used to support his or her conclusion as a reason, even if you do not believe it provides support for the conclusion. At this stage of critical thinking, you are trying to identify the argument. Because you want to be fair to the person who made the argument, it makes good sense to use the principle of charity. If the writer or speaker believed he or she was providing support for the conclusion with some evidence or logic, then we should at least consider the reasoning. There will be plenty of time later to evaluate the reasoning carefully.



How good are the criticisms of Su Yinda's view?

Group discussion

- 1 Divide the class into two halves, one half compares the argument of Letter A, and the other half compares the argument of Letter B, with the argument of Su Yinda's letter (with reference to the table on Page 16). Then answer the following questions.
 - 1) Does the writer address the same issue as Su Yinda does?
 - 2) To what extent are the reasons given by the writer a direct rebuttal of Su Yinda's reasons?
 - 3) To what extent is the writer's conclusion a direct rebuttal of Su Yinda's conclusion?
 - 4) Do you think the writer's criticism of Su Yinda's letter is valid? Why or why not?
- 2 Those reading the same letter work in groups of four, and take turns reporting your answers to the above four questions. Then summarize the views of the group members.
- 3 Develop the summary of your group into a two-minute oral talk, and present it to the class.

Language work

1. Exploring linguistic features of an argument—personal reflection

Writers often use special words and expressions to indicate the conclusions and the reasons of their arguments. Is this also true of Su Yinda and the writer of the letter you have read? Write what you have found in the following table.

	Su Yinda's letter	The letter I have read
Conclusion		

(to be continued)



(continued)

	Su Yinda's letter	The letter I have read
Reasons		

2. Exploring linguistic features of an argument—discussion

In groups of three or four, share the results of personal reflection, and try to reach agreement on the words and expressions that indicate the conclusions and reasons.

Should US kids learn Chinese?

Further practice on argument analysis

- 1 The following passage is about the views for and against US kids learning Chinese. Identify the reasons for each view, and fill them in the table that follows the passage.

Should US kids learn Chinese?

Pro: A business plus

We live in a global and interconnected economy and we need to prepare our kids for it.

That preparation includes such skills as speaking outstanding English, since English remains a key language in global business, science, and technology. We must continue to address the alarmingly low levels of English proficiency we see in many of our students. Only 30% of US students are proficient English-language readers, according to state test data.

We also need to prepare our kids to navigate a global workplace in which

knowledge of languages and cultures other than our own will provide a key competitive advantage for higher-paying jobs.

China will inevitably be a major economic, political, and cultural force in our children's future. We should prepare our students to engage, collaborate, and compete with their Chinese peers.

Any diplomat or international business professional will attest to the tremendous advantage that speaking and respecting a counterpart's language brings to any negotiation or partnership. Increasingly, that colleague across the table will be a native Chinese speaker.

By teaching Mandarin in US public schools, we are making a wise investment in one of the many vital skills our children will need to compete for high-skill jobs and thrive in the interconnected 21st-century economy.

Con: A wrongheaded expense

The language of business is money, not Mandarin. Only a small percentage of Americans currently speak Mandarin, even in the business world. This has not prevented us from doing business with China. In fact, our liberal trade with China has spiraled out of control to the detriment of our own economy.

The US government owes Chinese investors more than \$1 trillion, a result of their heavy investment in our debt. In addition, our manufacturing base has been replaced by outsourced labor and domestic unemployment now exceeds 9%, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Our fiscal deficit has surpassed \$1 trillion per year and our nation's total debt has jumped to more than \$14 trillion. We should not be using scarce tax dollars to teach American students to speak Mandarin.

China also practices mercantile trade policies, including a pegged exchange rate, artificially deflated currency, and a lax regulatory environment. Teaching Mandarin will only provide extra incentives for US



companies to continue supporting these irresponsible policies.

As an alternative to teaching Mandarin, let's invest in teaching science, engineering, and mathematics in the hope of sparking innovation. Let's focus on bringing production back to the US and lowering the US unemployment rate. If China wants continued access to our marketplace, let's demand that it employ stricter labor and environmental regulations. We should also educate our children about all these issues. Otherwise, we will weaken our economy even further and do a great disservice to future generations.

	For	Against
Reasons		

2 Discuss with a partner which view is more convincingly argued, and why. How similar are your assessments?

III Hand gestures and communication

A | Interpreting hand gestures

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the essence of human life. Hand gestures are expressions of one's feelings, moods and emotions, and so they form a crucial part of non-verbal communication. Since our existence on this planet is highly linked to that of other human beings, it is essential that we learn to communicate in the right way. Naturally, this includes the ability to decipher the correct meaning of hand gestures.

What do these hand gestures mean?

Pair work

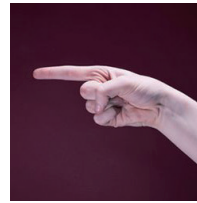
- Below are eight most popular hand gestures. Work independently to answer the questions below.
 - What does each gesture mean?
 - Is the meaning of the gesture positive, negative, or neutral?



A



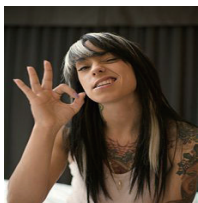
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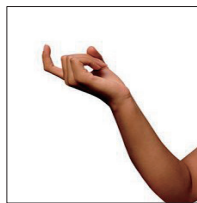
C



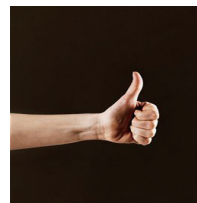
D



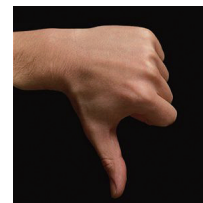
E



F



G



H

- Write your answers in the table.

Gesture	Meaning	Overtone
A		
B		
C		
D		
E		
F		
G		
H		

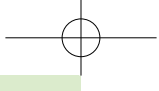
- 3 Share your answers with a partner. How similar are your opinions about the meanings of these gestures and their overtones? Discuss when you differ in your opinions.
- 4 Report your answers to the class, and see how similar or different your answers are from those of other pairs.

Popular hand gestures and their meanings

1. Identifying meanings of hand gestures and their overtones—listening & pair work

You are about to hear eight monologues, each describing a hand gesture you have just interpreted. Fill in the table below by following the instructions on the next page.

Monologue	Meaning	Overtone	Hand gesture
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			



UNIT 1 Language

1 Listening for general idea

Listen to the monologues once and match what you have heard with a hand gesture (A–H on Page 24) by putting the corresponding letter in the rightmost column of the table on Page 25.

2 Listening for details

Listen to the monologues again, this time focusing on the meanings of hand gestures and then inferring their respective overtones. Fill in the second and the third columns of the table. Pay attention to different overtones of the gestures in different cultures.

3 Check your answers to the above questions with your partner's. Read the transcript (Pages 31–32) if you are not sure whether your answers are correct or not.

2. Comparing interpretations —discussion

1 Look at your interpretations of the same hand gestures (Page 24). To what extent are they the same as what you have heard in the monologues? List the differences in both meaning and overtone.

2 Share the results of your comparison in a group of three or four. How similar are the results in the group? List interpretations common to the whole group as well as those specific to individual members.

3 Discuss what have caused the different interpretations.

Language work

1. Describing hand gestures—writing & pair work

1 Look at the eight pictures of hand gestures (Page 24), and try to describe each one using your own words. Write your descriptions in the following table.

2 Work with a partner. Each randomly chooses four gestures and reads the descriptions to the other to see if he or she can match each description with the correct gesture. Where misunderstanding occurs, the pair works together to make the expression acceptable to both.

Gesture	Description
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	
F	
G	
H	

2. Comparing descriptions—brainstorming

- 1 Read the following descriptions of the eight hand gestures, and check to what extent your own descriptions are similar to the ones you have read. Pay particular attention to the differences in the following aspects: (1) use of verbs, (2) use of finger names, and (3) use of phrases and sentence structures. List the major problems you have when describing hand gestures.

Gesture A: Raise the index and middle finger in the form of the letter “V” and bend the ring and little finger to touch the tip of the thumb.

Gesture B: Show the palm with all the fingers pointing upward.

Gesture C: Fist clenched, index finger pointing in the direction of the person or thing being talked about.

Gesture D: The index finger is crossed with the middle finger, with the thumb and remaining fingers bending toward the palm.

Gesture E: Raise the hand, with the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the index finger, and the rest three fingers remaining raised from the side of the index finger.

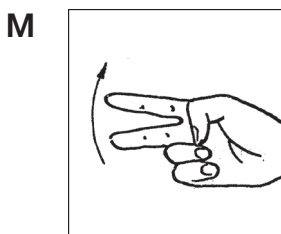
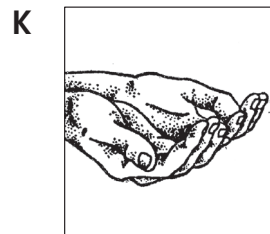
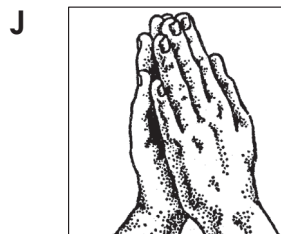
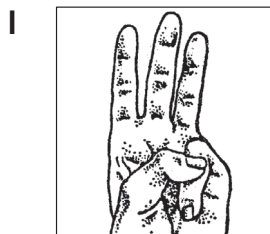
Gesture F: Extend the index finger and curl its tip.

Gesture G: The thumb is raised upward with other fingers curled inward.

Gesture H: A closed fist is held with the thumb extended downward.

- 2 In pairs, each tells the other the identified major problems. How similar are your problems? Try to work out your own rules of describing hand gestures.

- 3 Use the rules you have worked out to describe the following hand gestures.





Hand gestures and communication

B | *Cultural differences in gestural communication*

How do the Chinese use hand gestures to express these ideas?

Discussion & writing

- 1 Work in pairs to find out how the Chinese would express the following ideas with hand gestures. Describe the gestures in words and write them down in the table below.

Idea	Description of Chinese hand gestures
1) demonstrate the size of a fish	
2) indicate the numeral "one"	
3) point at an object	
4) tell someone to "come here"	
5) request your audience to be silent when speaking in public	

- 2 Present the results of your discussion to the class. How similar are your descriptions to those of other pairs?

Differences in hand gestures across cultures

1. Hand gestures in different cultures —reading

Read the extract below and do the task that follows.

Gesture

Here are a few more examples of gesture differences. An angler¹⁶ in Britain will demonstrate the size of a fish he has caught by holding his two hands, palms facing each other, the appropriate distance apart in front of him, but an angler from certain parts of Africa will measure off the size along his left arm with his right hand. In Britain the gesture to indicate the numeral "one" is made by holding up the index finger, but in Switzerland it is the thumb which is held up. Some peoples

¹⁶ angler: a person who fishes with a rod and line

point at objects with the finger, others by protruding¹⁷ the lips. The gesture for “come here” is made in Britain with the index finger, which is held, pointing upwards, at eye level and flexed towards the body; in Greece, the hand and forearm describe¹⁸ an arc¹⁹ away from the body towards the ground; in Egypt the hand is held at arm’s length, palm downwards, and the fingers are then flexed. (It is difficult, as these examples show, to describe gestures clearly in words.) In this last case the difference between the movements is very considerable, and the meaning of the Greek or the Egyptian gesture may be taken to be precisely the opposite to that intended, by those unfamiliar with it. In fact the very natural misinterpretation of such a gesture had disastrous consequences on one occasion. Several years ago, some European sailors were swimming some distance from their ship near a fortified coastal area in the eastern Mediterranean. Soldiers on guard, seeing unidentified people in a prohibited part of the sea and wishing to interrogate²⁰ them, shouted to them to come nearer, and made at the same time their usual “come here” gesture. The sailors did not understand the language but took the gesture to mean “go away”, and realizing they might be near coastal defences, swam off. The result was that the guards, now highly suspicious, opened fire with tragic effects.



Many other examples of different gestural expressions for the same idea could be given. It is also possible to find examples of the same gestural expression being used for different ideas, and this too may produce awkward failures of communication. For instance, an Englishman speaking in public would find it very natural if he wished to request his audience to be silent, to hold up both his hands on a level with his head, with the palms facing outwards. If he were to do this in Greece, however, it would cause deep offence to his audience, for this same gesture in that country is a most insulting one.

In groups of three or four, take turns performing the following gestures as described in the extract. Make sure you do them right (or at least everybody in your group agrees that they are right).

- 1) a British angler demonstrating the size of a big fish he has caught
- 2) an African angler demonstrating the size of a big fish he has caught
- 3) an Englishman indicating the numeral “one”
- 4) a Swiss indicating the numeral “one”
- 5) pointing at an object with the finger
- 6) pointing at an object by protruding the lips
- 7) an Englishman making the gesture for “come here”
- 8) a Greek making the gesture for “come here”
- 9) an Egyptian making the gesture for “come here”
- 10) an Englishman speaking in public making the gesture, requesting his audience to be silent

17 protruding: sticking out

18 describe: to make a shape

19 arc: 弧

20 interrogate: to question



UNIT 1 Language

2. Spotting cultural differences in hand gestures—pair work

- 1 For each idea listed in the table on Page 28, identify the similarities and differences between Chinese gesture and the gestures of other cultures. Then note down where the differences lie (i.e. a. the same gesture, different meanings; b. different gestures, same meaning; c. different gestures, different meanings).
- 2 Tell your partner what you have found. Have you and your partner made any discovery?

Language work

1. Analyzing descriptions of hand gestures—discussion

- 1 Underline every description of hand gestures in the extract (Pages 28–29), paying particular attention to the verbs and verbal phrases used. How many types of sentence structures do they appear in? Specify them.
- 2 Tell your partner what you have found. How similar are your findings?

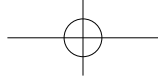
2. Analyzing the examples—pair work

- 1 You may have noticed that the writer of this extract gives many examples that illustrate the different meanings of the same gesture in different cultures. Now read the extract again, and answer the following questions.
 - 1) How many examples are given in the extract? Underline them.
 - 2) What do you think is the purpose that each example is intended to serve?
 - 3) Altogether how many types of purpose are the examples intended to serve? Specify them.
 - 4) How do you distinguish one purpose from the others?
- 2 Tell your partner about your answers to the above questions. Be ready to respond to your partner's requests for clarification and explanation.

Research

Project

- 1 Look at the following situations common in China. How do you think a Chinese person would interpret them?
 - 1) Someone smiles/laughs at you when you trip on a step or spill coffee on yourself.
 - 2) You stand in a queue which is so tightly packed that you can feel the person right behind you.
 - 3) People in the street stare or gape at you when you dress in a different way from most of other people.
 - 4) A young girl crosses her legs when sitting beside you.
 - 5) The person you are talking to blows his nose in a handkerchief, and then returns it to his pocket.
- 2 Find out how a Westerner would interpret the same situations by interviewing as many native English speakers from Western countries as you can find.
- 3 Write an exemplification essay illustrating the differences between the Chinese and Westerners in their interpretation of the above situations.



TRANSCRIPTS

I

Origins

A mini-lecture on theories about language origin

Exactly where, when and how language began is still a mystery and is likely to remain so. At best, only a few vague suggestions can be inferred. Early archaeological remains, for example, indicate that language was already in existence some half a million years ago. And it can be assumed that, since men have been living together for about a million years, and since any community requires some form of communication, the beginnings of language must be almost that old.

A number of theories have been established on how language began. The favourite is that early man imitated the sounds he heard in nature, such as the barking of a dog. For this reason, it has become known as the “bow-wow” theory. There can be no doubt that some words have their origins in natural sound, such as in English the names of birds, words for watery sounds such as *splash* and *slush*, and for hitting sounds such as *bump* and *crash*. However, the theory is inadequate since such words form only a minute proportion of any given language.

A second theory is known as the “pooh-pooh” theory. This states that speech originates in the cries of the human animal: cries of fear, surprise, pain or joy. It is maintained that this was the jumping-off point for language, that language developed out of these cries. But this is unhelpful: It does not explain the change that took place from mere cries and grunts to a language which communicated concepts; from a screech signalling immediate fear and danger to “I had a fight with a wild pig this morning while I was searching for wood.”

A third theory may be called the “mouth-gesture” theory. This suggests that the earliest human language was one of gestures, made by hand. These hand movements were then copied by movements of the mouth. It was then found that air blown through the mouth at the same time as these movements produced sounds. Over a period of time, these sounds developed

into speech. For example, a person cutting something with a pair of scissors may be seen to move his jaws in time to the blade of the scissors. However, though appearing more likely than the two theories outlined above, it suffers similar drawbacks to any theory of the origins of language: Lack of evidence means that we can only make intelligent guesses. No irrefutable conclusions can be drawn.

III

Hand gestures and communication

Popular hand gestures and their meanings

Monologue 1

Crossing fingers signifies anticipation and good luck. That is, we keep our fingers crossed when we hope something good will happen. In Christianity, crossing fingers signifies the “surefire way of defeating demons.” In ancient folklore such symbols represent “lies.”

Monologue 2

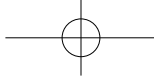
When you call someone or try to seek attention, then you usually follow this gesture. In the US it is used to summon waiters or it could also be a gesture of seduction. Displaying such gestures is condemned to be rude in Japan while in Singapore curling index fingers represents death. Curling the index finger is popularly known as the “dog call.”

Monologue 3

In the US, the “victory” symbol was popularized by Richard Nixon of America. Anti-Vietnam-War protesters used it during the 1960s as a sign of peace and love. The “V” sign is considered to be rude in Italy and if you are showing the back of your hand with your fingers forming “V,” then it is an insult. The same view is held in Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand.

Monologue 4

This gesture means “great,” “perfect” or “absolutely fine” in the US while in Europe what it signifies has an insulting overtone. The circle formed by curling the index finger into the thumb means that the person



UNIT 1 Language

pointed at is “zero” and insignificant. In Brazil and Germany it is a symbol of slang and a homosexual individual.

Monologue 5

The thumb-down sign is an indication of something that is bad or something that you do not approve of. It also indicates that something or someone has failed. Since this is a rude hand gesture and an arrogant way to indicate failure, it is seldom used.

Monologue 6

In the United States, “stop” is depicted by showing the palm with all the fingers pointing upward. This form of hand gesture also has other connotations like “stay away” or “talk to the hand.” In Malaysia, raising the hand is explicitly done to summon waiters or someone for conveying a message.

Monologue 7

The thumb raised upward with other fingers curled inward is universally acknowledged as “well done” or “things are great.” In Western culture it is a symbol of optimism. But in the Middle East, Latin America, Greece, Russia, and West Africa, thumbs-up means insulting others.

Monologue 8

Pointing fingers normally means indicating someone or some object. It is probably the most common hand gesture. You will also find babies pointing their fingers at objects they want. People also believe that pointing fingers could also mean placing blame on someone. Western countries consider finger-pointing to be one of the most obscene hand gestures. Pointing the middle finger is a symbol of sexual disgrace.