

## Re: genes and language (Homer, Richard Dawkins)

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*From:* Franz Gnaedinger (*frgn\_at\_bluemail.ch*)

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What is the difference between language and communication?  
You shall know the answer by the end of this message.

Here again my basic definition of language from 1974/75:  
Language is the means of getting help and understanding  
from those we depend upon in one way or another – and  
every means of getting such help may be called language.

I told you about Nera, our funny, kind, and clever dog  
from India. She could express herself in many ways: bark,  
whine, moan, howl, seldomly growl, and sometimes kind of  
sing; play her white eyebrows in her black face; wag her  
tail and give other body signals. We replied to her using  
human language, and she obviously understood several words.  
And if not the actual words then surely the tone including  
undertones. In an 'Oh no, don't you see I am working?' she  
could hear a concealed message: 'I should work, but I can  
need a break, so let us fool around some.' She understood  
our body language, even some of our mimic, I guess, and  
certainly other signals dogs can interpret, such as odors  
released in the sweat, and perhaps further signals we are  
conveying unconsciously.

All those signals together may be called communication.  
If language resembles a car, a bicycle, a horse wagon,  
et cetera, communication resembles the traffic, the sum  
of all vehicles in motion, passing by on a street ...

The world is brimming of communication. The cells in a  
body communicate by exchanging molecules and even small  
organelles, ions and photons; some trees warn each other  
of insects feeding on their leaves by emitting a gas;  
animals evolved many ways of communicating; even bacteria  
emit signals, calling other bacteria to join them e.g. on  
a drop of fat in a sink; and the greatest accomplishment  
of biological agents, namely the biosphere, is maintained  
via zillions of "voices" we don't hear – as we don't ever  
notice all the calls to cell phones radiating through the

air, travelling across the sky; we just receive the one  
call that has our name or number to it.

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Regards Franz Gnaedinger [www.seshat.ch](http://www.seshat.ch)

- > *Language is the means of getting help and understanding*
- > *from those we depend upon (my definition from 1974/75),*
- > *and a basic need of social beings is to belong: to be*
- > *accepted and estimated as valid members of the various*
- > *communities we are a part of, we are partaking in.*
- >
- > *I told you of Nera, a dog from India; how she placed*
- > *her head on the table, played her white eyebrows in her*
- > *black face, begging for food from our meal – and ate a*
- > *whole heap of peanut shells, for sharing a meal with us*
- > *made her feel accepted as a true member of our tribe.*
- >
- > *I also told you of a little girl I used to take with me*
- > *to shopping; how I once made a joke by telling her that*
- > *I was already gone, and on my way to the village, while*
- > *standing right in front of her, and how the poor mite*
- > *began crying. The fear of being abandoned is so strong*
- > *that it can overflow the mind and blind the eyes (while*
- > *big promises can blind people in a metaphorical sense).*
- >
- > *The human brain easily recognizes angry voices, due to*
- > *the amygdoid nucleus (a new discovery). We are always*
- > *fearing to be excluded in one way or another, so when*
- > *we hear an angry voice we wonder whether someone might*
- > *be angry at us? and if so, why? and can we possibly do*
- > *something about it? in order to be accepted again?*
- >
- > *There are frightening examples of people who have been*
- > *excluded from their tribe and died; a shaman or witch*
- > *doctor spoke his banning formula, and the banned person*
- > *died two days later, from no obvious reason other than*
- > *the spoken words (I read about such a case from Africa,*
- > *in a reliable book; alas, I can't remember its title).*
- >
- > *Not being spoken to is hard punishment, while words*
- > *console and heal. Even chatting is a pleasure; no need*
- > *to say much, the mere sounds – or words on a screen –*
- > *weave a band of mutual belonging. Which is why not only*
- > *the much abused forum sci.archaeology but also the well*
- > *kept forum sci.lang are mainly chatrooms ...*
- > –
- > *Regards Franz Gnaedinger [www.seshat.ch](http://www.seshat.ch)*
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- >> *The loving embrace and soothing voice of a mother tells*
- >> *her baby, her child: you belong to me, to us, to our*

> > *family. When a child grows up, the embraces and touches  
> > become less, while the words take over and weave a band  
> > among the members of the family, of the tribe, of the  
> > various communities, of the nation, of the world.*

> >  
> > *The touches and voices of early childhood are never  
> > forgotten and keep a hold on a human being. The mother  
> > can heal a hurting knee of her child just by placing her  
> > hand on it and saying a magic formula. We got a simple  
> > one in Switzerland: Hila Hila saega = heal heal saying,  
> > and it always worked when I was a boy, the pain of my  
> > hurting knee immediately dissolved. The emphasis lies  
> > on SAE-ga, SAY-ing, testifying to the power of language.*

> >  
> > *Doctors know the healing power touches and words hold  
> > on a human being. When you visit a doctor you have to  
> > wait, and it may happen that you are sliding into some  
> > kind of meditation. When you are finally called in you  
> > see a doctor in white, which color makes him or her  
> > appear larger, bigger. His or her language contains  
> > mysterious words, and the books on the shelves are  
> > certainly plain incomprehensible. You are feeling like  
> > a child again, and the more so as you are reduced by  
> > your pain and suffering that requires a doctor's help.  
> > In such a situation you glide back into childhood, when  
> > you were utterly depending on the grown-ups, when they  
> > were so big and you so small, when they spoke about  
> > things you barely understood, when all was mysterious,  
> > and when a loving embrace and soothing voice dissolved  
> > many a pain. By trusting your doctor you fall back  
> > into early childhood and relive the wonder of the  
> > healing voice and touch – better than many pills.*

> >  
> > *Language is the means of getting the help of those  
> > we depend upon in one way or another. The basic need  
> > of social beings is belonging to their communities,  
> > which need is satisfied by the weaving band of  
> > language itself.*