



ENGLISH ENTRANCE EXAM: JUNE 15, 2013

Name and Surname(s): _____

Time allowed for this exam: 2 Hours

Before starting, please read the following carefully:

- ☞ *All mobile phones must be turned off.*
- ☞ *Make sure your name is correctly given above.*
- ☞ *There are three parts to this exam – each carries the same weight:*
 - I. Reading Comprehension*
 - II. Language Work*
 - III. Written Essay.*
- ☞ *Write all your answers in English in this exam booklet. Use the spaces provided.*
- ☞ *All rough paper will be collected after the exam.*

POLITE WARNING!

***ANY TALKING, COPYING OR USE OF NON-AUTHORISED DEVICES DURING THE EXAM
WILL MEAN AUTOMATIC AND IMMEDIATE DISQUALIFICATION***

I. Reading Comprehension

II. Language Work

III. Essay

European and Asian languages traced back to single mother tongue spoken 15,000 years ago

1 The intriguing idea of a single ancestral language can be found as far back as the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, and has been the subject of debate for centuries. But for modern historical linguists this poses two major
5 questions: how far do we have to go back in time to find this proto-language, and how can we prove this scientifically in the absence of written records?

According to a recent study by scientists in Britain, languages spoken by billions of people across Europe
10 and Asia are descended from an ancient tongue uttered in southern Europe at the end of the last ice age. Their findings point to a common origin for vocabularies as varied as English, Urdu and Japanese.



A team of researchers led by Mark Pagel, an evolutionary biologist at Reading University,
15 believe that there was an original language, spoken at least 15,000 years ago, which gave rise to seven ancient languages commonly known as the Eurasiatic “superfamily”. These in turn split into languages now spoken all over Eurasia, from Portugal to Siberia. According to Pagel, “Everybody in Eurasia can trace their linguistic ancestry back to a group, or groups, of people living around 15,000 years ago, probably in southern Europe when the ice sheets were retreating.”

20 Linguists have long debated the notion of an ancient Eurasiatic superfamily and one of the methods used to identify the members of this family is to find words which sound the same and have a similar meaning across different and dispersed languages today. For example, the proximity between the English *brother* and the Sanskrit *brahtr*. However, this method has been criticized as being inconclusive and problematic for two basic reasons. First, words evolve too rapidly to tell us
25 where they come from. For example, the way a word is pronounced can change a lot over time, it can be replaced by a synonym or substituted for a word borrowed from other languages. In fact most words are subject to such changes anywhere between a few hundred and a few thousand years. The second reason is that there hasn’t been sufficient statistical evidence to verify solid links between modern and early words.

30 So, Pagel’s team decided to adopt an alternative approach. In an earlier study they demonstrated that some frequently used words, such as pronouns, numbers and adverbs last much longer, 5,000-9,000 years, before being replaced. But their latest study takes this a step further. They used a computer model to generate a list of commonly used words in a sample of European and Asian languages today to predict those words that would change so rarely that they should sound similar in
35 these proposed Eurasiatic languages. They then compared their list against a database of early words reconstructed by historical linguists around the world to check the validity of their model. “Sure enough,” said Pagel, “a number of the words we predicted would be similar, appeared.”

Pagel and his team finally came up with a list of 23 words found in at least four of the seven Eurasiatic superfamily languages. Since these are words which change very slowly over time they
40 believe that they could have been spoken in an earlier form as long as 15,000 years ago. In other words, there are words being used today which date back to an original language. Most of them are high-frequency words in common speech, such as the pronouns for “I” and “we”, and the nouns, “man” and “mother”. But what has baffled them is that their list also includes terms such as the noun *bark* and the verb *to spit*. “I imagine bark was really important to early people,” said Pagel, “because
45 this covering on tree trunks was commonly used as insulation and to start fires. But I did not expect to find the verb ‘to spit’. I know we see footballers do it all the time, but I have no idea why it appears in this list of common words.”

Their study suggests that there are some words we use today which descend from an original language, but it leaves us with another puzzle: why would humans develop a system of communication that prevents them from communicating with other members of the same species?

I. Reading Comprehension (10 points)

Answer the following questions using your own words:

1. According to this article, what could be said about the origins of Catalan or Spanish? **(2 points)**
2. Why do you think Pagel's research team adopted a different method to find links between words from different languages? **(2 points)**
3. What was Pagel's reaction to finding the terms "bark" and "to spit" in their list of common words across various languages? **(2 points)**
4. What does the author mean by "their latest study takes this a step further"(l. 32)? **(2 points)**
5. In your opinion, how credible is this claim by Pagel and his team? **(2 points)**

II. Language work (10 points)

A) Explain the meaning of the following words / phrases in the context in which they appear:

1. traced back (title):

2. findings (*l. 12*):

3. gave rise to (*l. 15*):

4. split into (*l. 16*):

5. in other words (*ls. 40-41*):

6. baffled (*l. 43*):

B) Find a synonym in the text for the following:

1. infrequently:

2. spoken:

3. previous:

4. enough:

III. Essay (10 points)

Write a short essay (approximately 150-175 words) in response to the question below. Your essay should be clearly organised and coherent. Allow time to revise and check your essay for formal accuracy, spelling and punctuation.

Why do you think we find the origin of language or languages so fascinating?