

**The Evolution of Language**

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While the presence of different languages throughout the world is undeniable, the origin of language and its evolution is highly contentious. In part, the problem is that, unlike fossils, languages, especially unwritten languages (before about 4000 BC), do not preserve. There is virtually no evidence of their nature: This means that we do not know what these languages sounded like: For example, did they sing to express their thoughts, did they whistle, did they use gestures while they spoke, or gestures alone? Another major problem with understanding how languages got their start is that the single most influential linguist in the last seven decades, Noam Chomsky, claims language did not evolve but appeared suddenly by one gene in one person 100,000 years ago. The purpose of the present talk is to explain why Chomsky is wrong, how language did evolve, why people speak, and why the most popular topic in all the world’s cultures is gossip.

**Wilson Hall, One West**