

## In the origin of language: From the need for food to the need for tolerance

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**Abstract:** This research studies the relationship between humans and food and the development of language in a social context dating back to the beginnings of human history. The discovery of food represented the first moments that pushed humans to communicate with others, which in turn contributed to the emergence of language as a means of exchanging material and moral resources. Human language originated from the need to share food, accompanied by the development of communication from gestures to organized speech. Additionally, the research addresses the concept of generosity and solidarity in the context of food, noting that modern culture has affected these values. The research acknowledges that sharing food was a fundamental step towards building a human society based on cooperation and recognition of others' rights.

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Food, Generosity, Humanity, Speech.*

### 1. Introduction

I appreciate that the greatest pleasure ever tasted by humans, and which still has a lasting impact on their minds throughout human history, is that which overwhelmed their being when they discovered for the first time that they are not alone in the universe, that there is a similar being that emerged with them on Earth, and that this similar being is not always evil, but a possible reason for inventing the joy of living together. However, the adventure of confirming the existence of this joy in human history does not negate that without achieving it there were conflicts and struggles. Nothing placed one person's life in opposition to another's except the desire for life itself, meaning: the guarantee of food and progeny. It is plausible to think that these humans, even if they were somewhat equal in the skill of knapping stones and sharpening branches and turning them into hunting weapons since slightly over three million years before Christ, were not equal in finding food, water, and plant resources on Earth, as this remained difficult for them due to its association with luck or rarity or both. Luck, by nature, is a statement that moves within the realm of the possible and the rare combined, and therefore we must now admit that we are fortunate in this world because our ancestors found their food. However, finding and preserving food was fraught with many dangers in those times. It is estimated that these dangers were the cause of the emergence of society in humans, and that this society hastened the emergence of speech. In light of this assumption, our article will seek to deconstruct the origin of speech in relation to food.

#### 1.1. Ethics of Food

We estimate that the scarcity of one of our early ancestors in obtaining food may have sometimes driven him to ambush others to seize their food. In such cases, that other person, who was adept at managing his food, had only two options: either to guard his food from theft by others, which could cost him his life, or to give the hungry others something beyond his personal need from that food, later

known as generosity<sup>1</sup>, sometimes reaching the level of selflessness. It is fitting to point out here, albeit hastily, that the experience of generosity has been eroded and neglected in our era, not due to general goodness among humans but to the growth of a culture of greed among them to the extent that the rich reached into the pockets of the poor, and the state's zeal decreased, and they were content to be a burden on their citizens. The poet Al-Mutanabbi rightly said:

*"The hungry one eats from my provision and holds me so that it may be said, 'He is of great measure and intention.'"*

The first great discovery that the human being was guided to was the discovery of himself, and that is believed to be the factor that distinguished him from other living beings and gave him the primacy in interpreting the phenomena of the world around him, not to mention his desire to control its laws and to exploit them greedily to the point of excess.

In line with this, I say that the concept of man, in terms of what it means for the human individual to possess the tool of language, to have self-awareness and awareness of the world, and the need to live with others, is something that necessitated an event that triggered the beginnings of his linguistic epic and opened his eyes to the pleasure of feeling that he is not alone in the universe. This pleasure is conditional on the protection of the reasons for the existence of the other, because "the need of some people for others is an essential trait in their nature, and a prevailing standing in their cores<sup>2</sup>," which I assume gradually materialized during the moments when humans transitioned from seizing food from others by force to sharing food with others willingly. Specifically, when the seizure of others was an actual act that did not require linguistic negotiation (those who seize have no time to talk, or rather, do not need to talk at all: to seize means to disable the speech mechanism, to negate it), it is then possible to consider that the initial creation of the concept of a human and the flow of language on his tongue, to some extent, preceded any reference to him. Instead, it appeared with the first individual who wished to have his food shared by his peer, so he welcomed him with a series of gestures<sup>3</sup> and underlying sounds that were formed into an appropriate composition to convey his intention.

If this is the case, which is reasonable, it is also possible to imagine that this guest peer became aware of the gentleness of communication with his host and felt a sense of human joy from that incident. He formed, in turn, sounds and expressed features, guessing that they indicate gratitude from the host, and with his grateful expression, he transitioned from the stage of silence and gesture to the stage of arranging sounds, meaning: to the beginnings of speech. Accordingly, the glory in discovering the concept of man returns to that moment when language appeared on the human's lips following his association with his peer around food, and what resulted from that was the rise of the human spirit in the peer, a rise planted with feelings of awe and conscience reproach, love, joy, compassion, and assurance towards the other. Consequently, he chose, following these feelings, to refrain in the future from seizing the goods of those with whom he shared food<sup>4</sup>, and perhaps even sought to protect that food and the owner of the food himself simultaneously. Undoubtedly, the desire to transmit the feeling of joy to others overcame the guest peer, finding pleasure in spreading that joy that filled his mind and body, and thus decided to create it in the soul of others by inviting another peer to share with him more than his need was in terms of food, to some extent the saying passed with us. From that sharing, a reason for speech arose, which we will later find a philosophical image for in Plato's banquet, where the act of eating turns into a speech event that establishes many of the thoughts that still act in our modern times.

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**Saeed Al-Sarihi states that generosity is a social value** "resulting from harsh environmental conditions that reduce the act of honoring a<sup>1</sup> guest to the level of necessity, not only to save them from starvation but also to avert the danger that need might compel them to take what they require by cunning or force, as if generosity is a ransom for money by spending some money" (See: Saeed Al-Sarihi: *The Veil of Habit: An Archaeology of Generosity, From Discourse to Experience*, Dar Madarek Publishing, Vol.3, p.12, Riyadh/Saudi Arabia, 2021).

**Al-Jahiz: Al-Hayawan**, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, 2014, p.41.<sup>2</sup>

There is a strong return to studying physical gestures because they are more indicative of our conditions than speech.<sup>3</sup>

The sharing of "water and salt" by two or more persons (which is a metaphor for food) is considered in social custom as a type of moral<sup>4</sup> covenant that prevents one from betraying the other.

If we try to summarize this historical phase, we can say that as human food contributed to the emergence of speech, and his tongue became, in addition to being a tool for food, a tool for managing speech, a self-awareness was born that kept growing and expanding with every experience he went through until it reached a stage where he managed his livelihood and became passionate about tracking the mysterious natural phenomena to stand on their movement conditions and understand them, and he became aware of his physiological changes that started to appear and the differentiation of his kind from other creatures in his environment. All of that contributed to the creation of the concept of a human on earth, a concept that did not stop enhancing his presence in the mind and the human reality, and thus revealed to the human eye a horizon of existence, broad and peaceful, which is the horizon of humanity.

## 2. The Dawn of Humanity

It is likely that the gathering for food accelerated the emergence of speech, and over time, humans found in their language a tool to compensate for their inability to control what exists around them. Thus, whenever it was difficult to pick a fruit from the top of its tree, or to hunt an animal in the wild due to its speed, they would pick that fruit and hunt that animal through naming them. Their life in those times was a continuous hunt: hunting prey with arrows and hunting things of the world and its beings with speech, by composing it among sounds that existed in their minds into a suitable composition for the act of speaking. If language extends its hand over many of the world's vocabulary, and removes from it the ambiguity that envelops it, when we name living beings and things, we are essentially chasing them from the forests of nothingness to existence, meaning: we are attributing them to the clasp of language. Naming is hunting. Based on this, it is possible to believe that the pleasure of sharing food among individuals living in a limited geographical space that was easily spread among them gave rise to the first human group linking their members through food and speech relations. These connections possibly mitigated their primitive violent energies and encouraged them to look into the nature beyond their food, meaning: the pleasure of their speech when they gather. Thus, storytelling appeared, and perhaps from its poetry, philosophy, and drawing emerged. This contributed to the growth of their awareness of the possibilities of their language to facilitate communication among themselves, diversifying their contexts of use, and varying in creating its words and varying its structures. Even if they felt comfortable expressing some of their thoughts with their verbal repertoire, the expressiveness of language at that time, as I appreciate it, was insufficient to meet all their emergent and renewed communicative needs, especially since they were in the midst of unveiling their self-awareness and uncovering the world around them. As a result, they embedded—due to this—some of their thoughts, dreams, ideas, and stories into food, making the pleasure of food mixed with the pleasure of speech, and thus their food was filled with their speech. This turned into a pattern of emotional messages transmitted by each one of them to their grandchildren through appropriate educational methods for their times, and the presence of these messages continued to some extent until our present day.

In the same context, I find that religious narratives about the creation of the world indicate their tendency to consider the meaning of speech as intertwined with and governed by food. For instance, if the fruit of the tree preceded the commandment of not eating it in the first communication between God and Adam, it makes me appreciate that the meaning of the prohibition is present in the tree's characteristic itself (in terms of producing a forbidden fruit) before being formulated in the sentence of prohibition "And do not approach this tree" (Al-Baqarah, 35). Thus, food preceded the speech of prohibition and was its cause, which allows me to say that the speech of prohibition itself was latent in the food (the tree's fruit). In this context, the request of the interlocutors for a table from heaven is not read as their inability to God (because they know the God of Moses and among them were those who worshiped him). Instead, I find it a confirmation of the power of food in adding credibility to speech and to the speaker at the same time, as if food owns the reality of speech, controls the movement of its connotations, and protects its prophecies, even if that speech is of a prophetic nature. This is evident in

His saying: “They said, ‘We want to eat from it and secure our hearts, and to know that you have been truthful to us, and to be among the witnesses over it’” (Al-Ma’idah, 113).

Relying on the dynamics of this livelihood phase in which the concept of man was created, I consider that this process took a long period of time during which the ability to speak and the desire to associate with others became entrenched. The group of people moved from the individual sphere to the collective sphere, creating a space that ensured living among all its members. This indicates that the desire to share food, like the desire to share speech, is a desire of necessity that rises to the level of a message that humans will strive to convey to their descendants to sustain their existence on Earth. Moreover, it will urge them to comply with it in the form of a set of values connected with selflessness, preservation of progeny, cultivation of the Earth, and cooperation.

### 3. Conclusion

Sharing food is the first manifestation of the art of tolerance among humans, and the oldest page written in the history of recognizing others’ sanctity and their right to live with dignity, meaning: their full right to life. Humans, seeking to establish this right on Earth in a humane culture, have needed long times in which myths, religions, strange ideologies, wars, international organizations, sciences, and a lot of emotional poetry emerged. In the course of this, one of them, described in summary, would be the human always striving for that humanity as a crowning of his distinguished presence in the world. This is because since the dawn of history, he has not trained himself to achieve his humanity and its solutions, and often died from the hardships of the path to it. From the above, the following results and recommendations can be extracted:

### 4. Results

- Sharing food is considered one of the oldest and clearest manifestations of the culture of tolerance among humans, as it reflects the initial steps in recognizing others’ right to live with dignity, contributing to the building of a global human culture.
- Humans, since the dawn of their history, have strived to achieve their humanity despite numerous challenges, and this continuous pursuit required great sacrifices, as humans often died striving for their humanity.
- There is a link between the origin of human language and the emergence of the need for social communication during the sharing of food. When humans gathered with others to eat, they had to invent gestures and sounds for communication, leading to the emergence of language. This communication contributed to developing the concept of man and his self-awareness and awareness of others.
- Gathering for food does not only meet physical needs but also contributes to establishing strong social bonds, leading to the development of concepts such as generosity, selflessness, and cooperation. Human values transitioned from mere sharing of food to linguistic and intellectual contributions that strengthen the group and preserve human existence.
- Some religious texts include the idea that food contains a pre-existing or latent meaning that can be deduced through speech, such as the prohibition against eating the tree’s fruit in the religious story. According to this view, food is not just a nutritional substance but carries moral or existential messages that affect human conditions in existence.

### 5. Recommendations

- **Enhance the culture of generosity and cooperation among community members**, as human history begins with sharing food and resources, which contributes to reducing violence and strengthening cooperative and hospitable ties. Therefore, individuals should be encouraged to give others more than their need in terms of food and resources to strengthen human bonds and combat the prevalent culture of greed in our era.

- **Focus on developing linguistic awareness in societies**, as language was the first tool used by humans to express their ideas and feelings. Therefore, individuals should be encouraged to learn languages and use them in all forms of expression, whether in literature, philosophy, or arts, because language is a means to manage human differences well and enhance intellectual and human communication.
- **Reevaluate the importance of food as a social and cultural factor**: The role that food plays in building communities and cultures should be reassessed, as food can be a main driver for forming deep human relationships. Through sharing food, humans begin to form groups and communities that build a culture of cooperation and mutual welfare, contributing to the reinforcement of fundamental human values such as selflessness and compassion.

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