

FROM ALTAMIRA TO EMOJI – THE EVOLUTION OF EXPRESSION

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Abstract

Expression and humane languages have faced myriad evolutions in the past centuries, but never more so than following the invention of a digitized pictorial linguistic form. This article hence aims at analysing this evolution through a historic-economic analysis of secondary sources.

Keywords: *Linguistics, Expression, Language, Communication, Linguistic History.*

Two wild bulls rush towards each other with their horns pointed at the other. Their coats are strange – strangely organic. They look real and unreal at the same time. And the background - it is an uneven coarse stony wall on which they are depicted fighting. They look both real and unreal, painted by someone who lived several million years ago. He used the colours that he had created himself. Patent or no-patent law had no remains to answer how the colours are so visible, vivid even now. So vivid that the cave paintings of Altamira in Spain are one of the unsolved mysteries that the first generation of Homo sapiens' have left for us to solve. The cave paintings of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh lie almost a thousand miles away from Spain, but are as vivid as them, and as reminiscent of the same mystery that they left for us to solve. What is it that made their paintings made so many million years ago so vivid?

We are yet to discover the mysteries, or maybe we should admit that we cannot solve the mystery. But keeping that aside, we should now ask ourselves – why did he paint it at all? What made the man millions of years ago in the cave of

Altamira want to paint? Or the man in Bhimbetka, or in the caves scattered all over the world now in ruins? Why did he paint it? Just to puzzle the generations to come after them?

The puzzle however took the so-called modern version of Homo sapiens' too much effort to figure out what the earliest version of expression, or to put it more formally what the origin of language was. The shortage of empirical evidence put in the highest impediment to the finding. Though the researchers tried hard to crack it with fossil records, archaeological evidence, and studies of language acquisition, they are still fighting on numerous hypotheses. Some started with Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection¹, up to the 'continuity' theory and its opposite approach, the 'discontinuity' theory. The scope of our discussion however, does not encourage us to go into the details of theory as we are concerned with the form, the need and evolution of expression rather than the evolution of language which comes under the purview of linguistic scholars. Whether expression and language have one to one correspondence or not can be a topic of serious

¹ Ruse, Michaël. "Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution: An Analysis", Journal of History of Biology, vol. 8 no. 2, 1975, pp. 219-41

interest. We however take language as a necessary but not sufficient condition for expression.

Maybe our painter did not even think about that. All he wanted was to communicate. He wanted to tell the story of the bulls fighting that he must have seen while hunting – to his beloved partner, to one of his kin. Maybe the progress of his verbal language had not sufficed his emotions. Or even his sign language had, he had wanted to tell the story more vividly. How eternal is the need to communicate! Like we want tell our child some magnificent thing that had happened while coming back home.

Was that all? Or the painter/painters were the people with higher emotional or intelligence quotient in our dwarfed modern terminology? They knew that they would have to leave the cave in their nomadic search of livelihood. They knew that they might die the next day by the attack of the very same giant bull. So, they gathered all their passion and labour together to make this story immortal. Communication, the continuation of communication through generations and the immortality of scenes through time was such a primitive need. A need so strong that in the pre-Renaissance period the Christian monks² made manuscripts of the Scriptures, day and night, the Buddhist lamas did the same. And we do not forget the Hindu practice of *shruti*, to preserve the verbal immortality of words. The painters of Altamira, Bhimbetka, wanted to tell the story to someone else, perhaps to all. And not only immortality, but the wide horizon of immortality was there in the primitive need for communication. It is thus that after Renaissance, the spectrum of books was limited to religion no longer but widened on. And then came the Gutenberg Press, which used the primitive need and induced it to more technicality, but for the very same need. Back home, 300 years

later, William Carey and Raja Rammohun Roy would do the same.

The crux of the matter remained the same – the need to communicate and to share with all. The sharing of their untold and maybe oft told story might bear the desire to not be buried under layers of dust even when they themselves are non-existent. It is this need that brought us from Altamira³, to hieroglyphics, to developing the script in China, and to Dead Sea Scrolls. Science led us to paper and printing that we spoke of before.

It is clichéd to say that history repeats itself. But how surprising is it, that the history of the evolution of language, of communication, of sharing, has taken its course to defy and at the same time to assert the repetition of history. We do not know how Neanderthal or Neolithic men communicated, but we do have an account of how the Homo sapiens' communicated, and so forth. They used pictograph – as we see in the cave paintings, as we see in the hieroglyphs. We, the 21st century Homo sapiens species, are taking every step back, one at a time. First, they almost stopped reading books – the very same books which had evolved with so much nurturing care from the monks in Orders, Johannes Gutenberg and then William Carey.

Of course, there are some exceptions and E-books, and some eminent writers are still trying to share their emotions, it is the change in the mindset of people in terms of lack of time, lack of patience, which perhaps contributes to lessen the interest to know the told untold stories. The contradiction which perhaps spared the first generation of Homo sapiens species has not spared the technology-dependent ones. They do not have patience to listen to other people's stories, but they still want to share. Not the stories, for stories need time even

² Cook, O.F. "The Biological Evolution of Language", The Monist, vol. 14 no. 4, 1904, pp. 481-91

³ Clark, R. L Stephan, "The Evolution of Language - Truth and Lies", Philosophy, vol. 75 no. 293, 2000, pp. 401-21

to be told. They share the nitty-gritty of their everyday life – how they have dressed up or had a nice lunch. The communities they want to share with are people who do not have patience to listen to stories, but only to express their liking or disliking to this ‘share’. The platform, as we all know, can be any window of internet, namely Facebook WhatsApp Instagram and so on. At least we are assured up to this point of evolution of language, where books have metamorphosed into E-books, verbal communication has changed into Facebook ‘likes’ or dislikes with emotional support base.

The danger perhaps lies elsewhere. Following this path of technology and communication, the language has taken a severe change. We can argue that a language has always been subject to change. We must consider the view of Noam Chomsky who argues that a single chance mutation occurred in one individual in the order 100,000 years ago, installing language faculty (a component of the mind-brain) in ‘perfect’ or ‘near perfect’ form. The language used in Holy Bible; Shakespearean dramas took its own course to be more usable in simpler forms. Back here, in case of vernacular languages like Bengali, the language used in *Hutom Pyancha’r noksha* and the language used now are of stark difference.

The face of words used in SMS, WhatsApp or other messengers have shortened their lengths to such an extent that ‘congratulation’ now reads ‘congo’, or ‘shooting’ reads ‘stng’. A whole new dictionary of shortened forms of words has evolved, where ‘ROFL’ stands for ‘rolling on the floor laughing’, or ‘LOL’ means ‘Laugh out loud’.

The strangest part however lies in the fact that the abbreviation of words is not the only step taken in our backward journey of evolution. We can try to accept these abbreviations as the new mode of

language. But ‘emojis’ or using symbols to express our emotions are not only strange but alarming as well. Not only are we abbreviating words, but we are abbreviating our emotions to such an extent that even the usage of shortened words is being treated as unnecessary. We know how to express, but we are not feeling like expressing ourselves. The cave painter did not know how to express, but wanted to share and to communicate. That is why the whole evolution of expression took place. Where will our unwillingness to express, share or communicate properly head towards? Who should we blame for this? – the technology, or our nuclear family-oriented sociological evolution which has made us so self-centred that not only has the forum of verbal communication got abandoned (namely *adda*), the letters written to near and dear ones has become an object of history, and now words are getting replaced by symbols.

We spoke earlier on the change in language. So, nothing wrong in it. There is nothing wrong in the fact that the change in the form of language, or even in the form of expression has occurred. It is not the form; we are more concerned with the nature of change. The excess of technological dependence is not only destroying the right course of evolution of language but curbing the power of expression. An important study by Thomas Morgan, Professor of Psychology in the University of California, Berkley has indicated⁴ how human language may have evolved to help our ancestors make stone tools, a skill that was crucial for human race to progress. As we have already spoken of history repeating in a weird manner in the change in the form of expression, technology might still be helping the path of human progress, but taking away the power of language and expression from humans.⁵ This is not

⁴ Morgan, Thomas. “How Has Language Evolved Differently?” Nature Communications.2015.

⁵ Stout, Dietrich; Chaminade, Thierry; “Stone tool, language and the brain in human evolution” Philosophical Transaction, Vol. 367. 2012, pp. 75-87

the only danger. The major danger lies in a different fact.

Symbols here, perhaps, just symbolize alienation, the term much used in socio-psychological studies with deeper danger embedded in it. We here, are excluding the possibility of possible relation of this alienation with consumerism, as most of the Marxian studies indicate. We, however, are feeling more insecure of the fact that this alienation is taking us towards a different society. Some reflections are already in front of us with so many cases of juvenile criminal attempts and gruesome psychological murders. The evolution of expression is holding up a mirror in front of us, of an even bigger social evolution. Can we hear the siren of silence of the lambs?

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