II. Language: The Foundation of Thought

Bryson, Bill. The Mother Tongue: English & How It Got That Way. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990, p. 23-29.

> **Genesis 11:1** - Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.
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> **Genesis 11:6** - And the Lord said, "*Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.*
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> **Genesis 11:7** - *Come let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they might not understand one another's speech.*"
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> **Genesis 11:8** – So, the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.
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> **Genesis 11:9** - Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

The most elemental unit of language is the phoneme, generally the letters of a given alphabet. Morphemes are combinations of phonemes which make up elementary units of meaning, usually words. English has more than 100,000 morphemes, which arranged in various ways yield the million-word English vocabulary.

The typical educated adult has a vocabulary of around 40,000 words. An exceptional person might have over a 100,000-word vocabulary. These words can be combined into sentences according to rules called syntax. Syntax is the orderly system by which words are arranged harmoniously into sentences.

The most complex aspect of language is semantics. Semantics involve the way language expresses the meaning the thinker or speaker wishes to communicate with his words. In other words, semantics deal with content while syntax deals with arrangement.

If you want to convey a thought you must have a vocabulary from which you borrow words which best describe the thought you wish to communicate. This results in semantics.

PRINCIPLE: Those with small vocabularies have a hard time being understood.

The system by which you construct a thought so that a clear communication results depends upon proper syntax.
PRINCIPLE: Those who have poor grammar have a hard time communicating.

I quote from: **Thompson, Richard F. The Brain: A Neuroscience Primer. New York: (2d ed.) W. H. Freeman and Company, 1993, page 391:**

> *All languages, from English to obscure dialects, have the same degree of complexity and similar general properties. It is as though humans came into the world equipped with a well-elaborated, complex, and biologically determined language system. In short, it would seem that we may have speech and language centers in the brain that are in some ways predetermined or preprogrammed.*

Thompson begins his chapter on language by saying: Thompson, Richard F. The Brain: A Neuroscience Primer. New York: (2d ed.) W. H. Freeman and Company, 1993:

Language is the one species-typical behavior that sets humans completely apart from all other animals.

Why? Because the human race is the only animal to which God seeks to communicate. He has caused His thoughts to be written in Scripture which in itself requires the existence of language.

The languages of Scripture consist primarily of Hebrew and Koine Greek. God, being the inventor of language and the creator of the human brain communicates His message to man with a perfect vocabulary, utilizing perfect syntax, thus communicating perfect content. (See Cortex Transparency)

When a word is heard it is processed by the auditory cortex. However, the word cannot be understood until the auditory signal is processed in a section of the brain called Wernicke's area. (Named after German neurologist Carl Wernicke.)

EXAMPLE: Widdershins: (German) Wrong direction; reverse; left-handed; counterclockwise. Deasil: (Gaelic) Right-handed; clockwise.

If the word is to be spoken, information is transmitted to Broca's area through a bundle of nerve fibers called the arcuate fasciculus (AR–kue–wat fa–sik–ya–lus). (Named for French surgeon Pierre-Paul Broca (BRAW–kah).

In Broca's area, a program for speech is activated and supplied to the face area of the motor cortex which in turn drives the muscles of the lips, tongue, and larynx. When the written word is read, the visual image is transmitted to the visual cortex. From there the word is translated to its auditory form and then transferred to Wernicke's area where understanding is acquired.

Fact: The visual information acquired by seeing must first be converted to the auditory form before the word can be understood.

Fact: The auditory information acquired by hearing must first be transformed into the visual pattern before it can be spelled and rewritten.

Fact: Wernicke's area handles semantics and Broca's area takes care of syntax. Our study to this point already sheds light on our Lord's comments in:

> **Matthew 13:14*b*** - You will keep on hearing but you will not understand; and you will keep on seeing but will not perceive.