



The Origins of Language

The first person to set foot on the continent of Australia was a woman named Warramurrungung. She emerged from the sea onto an island off northern Australia and then headed inland, creating children and placing each one in a specific location. As she moved across the landscape, Warramurrungunji told each child, "I am putting you here. This is the language you should speak! This is your language!" (Erard, 2016).

This origin story comes from the Iwaidja people of Australia, as illustrated in the painting above. It not only provides an explanation of where language originated but also addresses the diversity of languages. While attempts to explain language origins among English-speaking people exist, there is limited proof to support any of them. Instead of a unified belief in a single mythical earth mother, there are various speculative beliefs.

The question of how language originated lacks a definitive answer. While it is known that the ability to produce sound and simple vocal patterns is present in an ancient part of the brain shared with all vertebrates, including fish, frogs, birds, and mammals, this does not constitute human language. It is suspected that some form of spoken language developed between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago, well before the advent of written language (approximately 5,000 years ago).

However, there is no direct evidence or artifacts from earlier periods of human life on Earth that shed light on the speech of our distant ancestors and how language evolved in its early stages. As a result, we are left with multiple speculations. The Iwaidja story of gods blessing humans with the power of language is among the closest narratives to the origin story, highlighting the mystery surrounding the emergence of language.