



The Natural Sound Source

I have quite a different view of the beginnings of language is based on the concept of natural sounds. The human auditory system is already functioning before birth (at around seven months). That early processing capacity develops into an ability to identify sounds in the sthat sound. This leads to the idea that primitive words derive from imitations of the natural sounds that early men and women heard around them. Among several nicknames that he invented to talk about the origins of speech, Jespersen (1922) called this idea the "bow-wow" theory

The -Bow-Wow" Theory In this scenario, when different objects flew by, making d caw-caw or coo-coo sounds, the early humans tried to imitate the sounds and then used them to refer to those objects even when they weren't present. The fact that all modern languages have some words with pronunciations that seem to echo naturally occurring sounds could be used to support this theory. In English, in addition to cuckoo, we have splash and bang. boom, rattle, buzz. huss screech and of course bow-wow. Words that sound similar to the noises they describe are examples of onomatopoeia While several words in any language are onomatopoeic, it is hard to see how most of the soundless things (e.g "low branch"), as well as abstract concepts (e.g "truth"),uld have been referred to in a language that simply echoed natural sounds. We might also be rather skeptical about a view that seems to assume that a language is only a set of words used as "names for things

The Pooh-Pooh" Theory Another of Jespersen's nicknames was the "pooh-pooh" theory, which proposed that speech developed from the instinctive sounds people make in emotional circumstances "that is, the original sounds of language may have come from natural cries of emotion such as pain, anger, and joy. By this route, presumably, Ouch! came to have its painful connotations. But Ouch! and. other interjections such as Ah!, Ooh!, Phew!, Wow! or Yuck! are usually produced with sudden intakes of breath, which is the opposite of ordinary talk. We normally produce spoken language as we breathe out, so we speak while we exhale, not inhale. In other words, the expressive noises people make in emotional reactions contain sounds that are not otherwise used in speech production and consequently would seem to be rather unlikely candidates as source sounds for language