

READING COMPREHENSIONS_01

Instructions

When I was little, children were bought two kinds of ice cream, sold from those white wagons with canopies made of silvery metal: either the two-cent cone or the four-cent ice-cream pie. The two-cent cone was very small, in fact, it could fit comfortably into a child's hand, and it was made by taking the ice cream from its container with a special scoop and piling it on the cone. Granny always suggested I eat only a part of the cone, then throw away the pointed end, because it had been touched by the vendor's hand (though that was the best part, nice and crunchy, and it was regularly eaten in secret, after a pretence of discarding it).

The four-cent pie was made by a special little machine, also silvery, which pressed two disks of sweet biscuit against a cylindrical section of ice cream. First, you had to thrust your tongue into the gap between the biscuits until it touched the central nucleus of ice cream; then, gradually, you ate the whole thing, the biscuit surfaces softening as they became soaked in creamy nectar. Granny had no advice to give here: in theory, the pies had been touched only by the machine; in practice, the vendor had held them in his hand while giving them to us, but it was impossible to isolate the contaminated area.

I was fascinated, however, by some of my peers, whose parents bought them not a four-cent pie but two two-cent cones. These privileged children advanced proudly with one cone in their right hand and one in their left; and expertly moving their head from side to side, they licked first one, then the other. This liturgy seemed to me so sumptuously enviable, that many times I asked to be allowed to celebrate it. In vain. My elders were inflexible: a four-cent ice, yes; but two two-cent ones, absolutely no.

As anyone can see, neither mathematics nor economy nor dietetics justified this refusal. Nor did hygiene, assuming that in due course the tips of both cones were discarded. The pathetic, and obviously mendacious, justification was that a boy concerned with turning his eyes from one cone to the other was more inclined to stumble over stones, steps, or cracks in the pavement. I dimly sensed that there was another secret justification, cruelly pedagogical, but I was unable to grasp it.

Today, citizen and victim of a consumer society, a civilization of excess and waste (which the society of the thirties was not), I realize that those dear and now departed elders were right. Two two-cent cones instead of one at four cents did not signify squandering, economically speaking, but symbolically they surely did. It was for this precise reason, that I yearned for them: because two ice creams suggested excess. And this was precisely why they were denied to me: because they looked indecent, an insult to poverty, a display of fictitious privilege, a boast of wealth. Only spoiled children ate two cones at once, those children who in fairy tales were rightly punished, as Pinocchio was when he rejected the skin and the stalk. And parents who encouraged this weakness, appropriate to little parvenus, were bringing up their children in the foolish theatre of "I'd like to but I can't." They were preparing them to turn up at touristclass check-in with a fake Gucci bag bought from a street peddler on the beach at Rimini.

Nowadays the moralist risks seeming at odds with morality, in a world where the consumer civilization now wants even adults to be spoiled, and promises them always something more, from the wristwatch in the box of detergent to the bonus bangle sheathed, with the magazine it accompanies, in a plastic envelope. Like the parents of those ambidextrous gluttons I so envied, the consumer civilization pretends to give more, but actually gives, for four cents, what is worth four cents. You will throw away the old

transistor radio to purchase the new one, that boasts an alarm clock as well, but some inexplicable defect in the mechanism will guarantee that the radio lasts only a year. The new cheap car will have leather seats, double side mirrors adjustable from inside, and a panelled dashboard, but it will not last nearly so long as the glorious old Fiat 500, which, even when it broke down, could be started again with a kick. The morality of the old days made Spartans of us all, while today's morality wants all of us to be sybarites.

Question 1

Which of the following cannot be inferred from the passage?

- A) Today's society is more extravagant than the society of the 1930s.
- B) The act of eating two ice cream cones is akin to a ceremonial process.
- C) Elders rightly suggested that a boy turning eyes from one cone to the other was more likely to fall.
- D) Despite seeming to promise more, the consumer civilization gives away exactly what the thing is worth.
- E) The consumer civilization attempts to spoil children and adults alike.

Question 2

The author pined for two two-cent cones instead of one four-cent pie because

- A) it made dietetic sense.
- B) it suggested intemperance.
- C) it was more fun.
- D) it had a visual appeal.
- E) he was a glutton.

Question 3

What does the author mean by "nowadays the moralist risks seeming at odds with morality"?

- A) The moralists of yesterday have become immoral today.
- B) The concept of morality has changed over the years.
- C) Consumerism is amoral.
- D) The risks associated with immorality have gone up.
- E) The purist's view of morality is fast becoming popular

Question 4

According to the author, the justification for refusal to let him eat two cones was plausibly

- A) didactic.

- B) dietetic.
- C) dialectic.
- D) diatonic.
- E) diastolic

Instructions

Language is not a cultural artifact that we learn the way we learn to tell time or how the federal government works. Instead, it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains. Language is a complex, specialized skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently. For these reasons some cognitive scientists have described language as a psychological faculty, a mental organ, a neural system, and a computational module. But I prefer the admittedly quaint term “instinct”. It conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs. Web-spinning was not invented by some unsung spider genius and does not depend on having had the right education or on having an aptitude for architecture or the construction trades. Rather, spiders spin spider webs because they have spider brains, which give them the urge to spin and the competence to succeed. Although there are differences between webs and words, I will encourage you to see language in this way, for it helps to make sense of the phenomena we will explore.

Thinking of language as an instinct inverts the popular wisdom, especially as it has been passed down in the canon of the humanities and social sciences. Language is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture. It is not a manifestation of a general capacity to use symbols: a three-year-old, we shall see, is a grammatical genius, but is quite incompetent at the visual arts, religious iconography, traffic signs, and the other staples of the semiotics curriculum. Though language is a magnificent ability unique to Homo sapiens among living species, it does not call for sequestering the study of humans from the domain of biology, for a magnificent ability unique to a particular living species is far from unique in the animal kingdom. Some kinds of bats home in on flying insects using Doppler sonar. Some kinds of migratory birds navigate thousands of miles by calibrating the positions of the constellations against the time of day and year. In nature’s talent show, we are simply a species of primate with our own act, a knack for communicating information about who did what to whom by modulating the sounds we make when we exhale.

Once you begin to look at language not as the ineffable essence of human uniqueness but as a biological adaptation to communicate information, it is no longer as tempting to see language as an insidious shaper of thought, and, we shall see, it is not. Moreover, seeing language as one of nature’s engineering marvels — an organ with “that perfection of structure and co-adaptation which justly excites our admiration,” in Darwin’s words - gives us a new respect for your ordinary Joe and the much-maligned English language (or any language). The complexity of language, from the scientist’s point of view, is part of our biological birthright; it is not something that parents teach their children or something that must be elaborated in school — as Oscar Wilde said, “Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to

remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.” A preschooler’s tacit knowledge of grammar is more sophisticated than the thickest style manual or the most state-of-the-art computer language system, and the same applies to all healthy human beings, even the notorious syntaxfracturing professional athlete and the, you know, like, inarticulate teenage skateboarder. Finally, since language is the product of a well engineered biological instinct, we shall see that it is not the nutty barrel of monkeys that entertainercolumnists make it out to be.

Question 5

According to the passage, which of the following does not stem from popular wisdom on language?

- A) Language is a cultural artifact.
- B) Language is a cultural invention.
- C) Language is learnt as we grow.
- D) Language is unique to Homo sapiens.
- E) Language is a psychological faculty.

Question 6

Which of the following can be used to replace the “spiders know how to spin webs” analogy as used by the author?

- A) A kitten learning to jump over a wall
- B) Bees collecting nectar
- C) A donkey carrying a load
- D) A horse running a Derby
- E) A pet clog protecting its owner’s property

Question 7

According to the passage, which of the following is unique to human beings?

- A) Ability to use symbols while communicating with one another.
- B) Ability to communicate with each other through voice modulation.
- C) Ability to communicate information to other members of the species.
- D) Ability to use sound as means of communication.
- E) All of the above.

Question 8

According to the passage, complexity of language cannot be taught by parents or at school to children because

- A) children instinctively know language.
- B) children learn the language on their own.
- C) language is not amenable to teaching.
- D) children know language better than their teachers or parents.
- E) children are born with the knowledge of semiotics.

Question 9

Which of the following best summarizes the passage?

- A) Language is unique to Homo sapiens.
- B) Language is neither learnt nor taught.
- C) Language is not a cultural invention or artifact as it is made out.
- D) Language is instinctive ability of human beings.
- E) Language is use of symbols unique to human beings.

Answer:-

1. Answer: C
2. Answer: B
3. Answer: B
4. Answer: A
5. Answer: E
6. Answer: B
7. Answer: B
8. Answer: A
9. Answer: D