

Language obsolete! Brain space to rent.

Neuroscientists of the Language department at MIT have succeeded in removing the linguistic capabilities of the human brain without affecting its ability to think as well as before their intervention. Our correspondent met with I.J., one of the students paid \$10 to participate in the one hour long experiment.

SUSHI NEWS — Now that you don't speak anymore, how are you still communicating?

I.J. — I just decide that I want to let you know something, at which point you'll know it. Because I don't have to formulate my thoughts in a natural language, you understand me to the full extent of the meaning, unambiguously. Actually you are becoming partially me, since how the language-free communication happens is by recreating a neural configuration of one brain into another brain. Depending on how much precision I want to give to my thoughts, the reconfiguration of the receiving brain might be almost total – if only for a short period –, leaving just enough space to let the host conscience observe my own without fusing with me.

SUSHI NEWS — Since you can't write or tape your speech either, we are puzzled by how you are recording your thinking.

I.J. — Oh, that's easy! When my friends on the other side of the campus have a thought for me, they just send a pill that I put on the tongue where it dissolves and triggers an electrochemical process in my brain that lets me know what they mean. Thought embedding is still hotly debated among scientists and I'm proud to be one of the first research subjects to impress my thoughts onto a much wider range of supports. My preferred one is food – I love to offer croissants in which I incorporate a poem and treat friends with drinks that reflect my state of mind. Sometimes the professors have to invite me to lunch because the papers I submit are in their meals – [giggles] a few times I was a cause of indigestion. We are currently experimenting with discarding our departmental library in favor of a five star restaurant, given today's technology that allows only for oral transmission of thoughts. Some artistically minded fellows went a step ahead and produced blank books, forcing the avid readers to eat the pages in order to get the taste of thoughts in which they were soaked.

SUSHI NEWS — What do you do with the free space in your brain generated by the disappearance of linguistic functions?

I.J. — Initially there is a rush from other functions to take over the freed areas, and there are messy moments when vision is fighting auditory perception for increased acuity, and the libido, emerging from the pituitary ganglia, wrangles with reason. However, the goal of our experiments is to keep the language areas free and use them to selectively enhance functions as the need arise. Personally I thought them as spaces where I can develop new sensorial capabilities beyond the five senses, but later I decided to make some money by renting out that brain space. People use it to perform computations, other to store data – I guarantee total privacy, of course –, some other even hide in me.

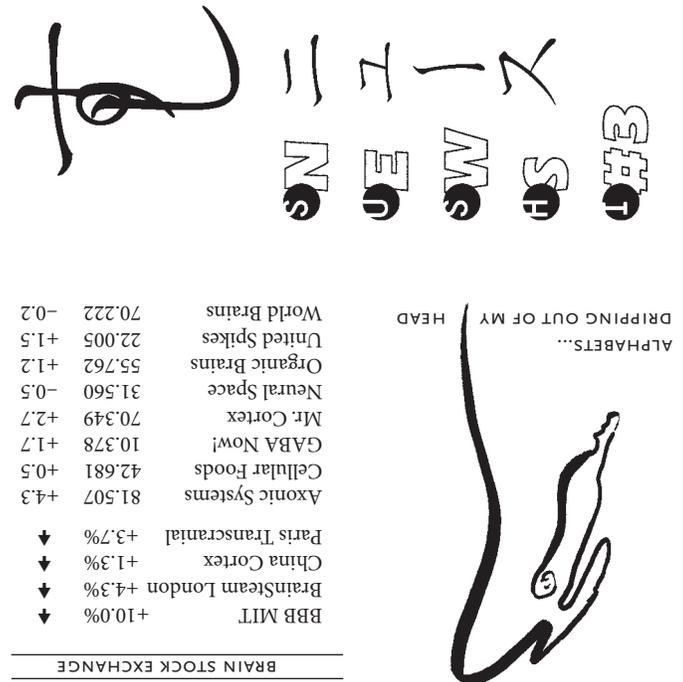
SUSHI NEWS — Thank you for sharing your thoughts with our readers!

These were the last words transcribed by our correspondent of his interview with I.J., at the end of which he was witnessed talking to trees, stones and the river, wondering loudly about all they told him, before his spirit finally rejoined a passing-by cloud, leaving behind him a mindless corpse.

BOOK REVIEW

Before Language, by Hellen Jacobsdottir, ed. (MIT Press, 256 p, \$32). — It is estimated that in a few years as much as 30% of the population will have undergone surgical language removal, a trend with profound implications for our society. With the urgency for anticipation studies in mind, the authors of this volume present the current knowledge on the neural changes that accompanied the appearance of language, as a basis that could help us to deal with its disappearance. The first part is devoted to theories of the origin. The "parasitic view" surmise that language capabilities evolved in specific areas of the brain to the detriment of other functions that populated those areas, which eventually were substantially reduced or drove to extinction. What exactly these functions where is hotly debated, the most audacious hypothesis

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being that of a second conscience evolved into language. The "infantologist theory" however brings arguments forward showing how language generated a neuronal bulge in which it could develop, deeply anchored in the brain by a dense web of synapses. An article discusses whereas the removal of language might result in a collapse of the entire brain structure and what the long term effects of the ablation are expected to be. Tracing leftovers of the language capability, we are told, is a rapidly expanding multi-million dollar market for neurosurgeons and medical imaging technologies. The second part of the book deals with topics of medical linguistic archeology. Several methods past generations having survived in one's brain. Another article aims to reconstruct the communication of extinct hominid branches and produce computer models of language evolution and artificial genes. The third part takes as starting point these findings and advocates a revisionist alternative to the growing popularity of language ablation. It is argued that present human linguistic skills could be transformed into a vastly more versatile communication and reasoning tool, if neural plasticity could be increased so that new languages could be learned on the fly. These new languages would be a mix of human idioms of all times, computer generated grammars and lexicons of the animal kingdom.