Language as the expression of a human capability that originates at birth

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The tradition of studies on language and its origin has developed theories that mainly focus on the acquisition of words and syntax. Although the debate is open, recent approaches are divided between a gradual learning of words and language, based on internal structure present in our mind (Chomsky 2002; Pinker, 1996), and those that propose a gradual development, where a key role is given by context and interhuman relationships (Tomasello, 2010). Both approaches develop from a common point, understanding language from words.

However, recent studies have demonstrated the importance that early childhood plays in language acquisition, that period when the child has not yet acquired a lexicon but is still able to communicate. Indeed, infants possess linguistic sensitivity present as early as birth (Wu et al., 2022; Gervain, Mehler 2010), a sensitivity that guides them before the maturation of the visual system (Mehler et al. 1978). Moreover, it is during the first year that children move from their first linguistic

experiments to the gradual learning of words, from simple structures to an increasingly complex communication system (Pinker, 1996).

According to the *Human Birth Theory* formulated in 1971 (Fagioli 1972, 2019), human reality is characterized precisely by this preverbal sensitivity. The theory identifies and defines the activation of the mind at birth (Maccari et al. 2017; Polese et al. 2022) with the first mental activity defined by the author as the *capability to imagine* (Fagioli 1972, 2006, 2019; Gatti 2015; Maccari et al. 2017). This corresponds to the capability to perceive the existence of itself and the presence of another human being (Maccari et al. 2017). The capability to imagine makes it possible to comprehend contents (images) having a meaning already present before language (Fagioli 1972; 1999; 2019).

Based on this conceptualization, this paper will consider these images the prerequisite for word acquisition, explaining the link between this preverbal capability of the human mind and language.

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