

## Tom Wolfe's foray into human speech

**Tom Wolfe is to be applauded** for his new book, "The Kingdom of Speech,"

in which he posits that speech, contrary to Noam Chomsky's position, did not arise from evolution but rather is a direct human creation. For those teaching children with autism, this truth is evident every day.

A primary diagnosis of autism is lack of speech and social interaction. For this large population, language is neither inherited nor instinctually structured, as Chomsky believes. The key to estab-

lishing language for those with autism is teaching functional communication, including alternative methods: sign language, pictures, touch-to-speak technology and mobile apps.

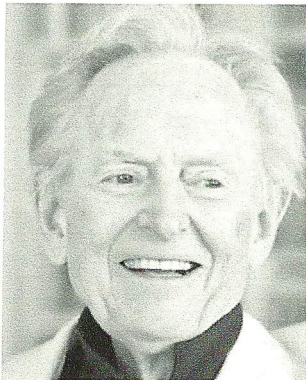
This functional approach is grounded in the science of applied-behavior analysis, proving Chomsky's structural theory false. For the Chomsky school, nature is weighted over nurture. In our experience, nurture is the path by which those with no speech skills can achieve meaningful communication.

If language were an innate characteristic rather than something that could be acquired, there would be no option for a child who can't speak. As those who teach children with autism know, this is clearly not the case. Teaching language, regardless of form, is a powerful tool to allow individuals diagnosed with autism to lead richer lives.

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**Tom Wolfe**