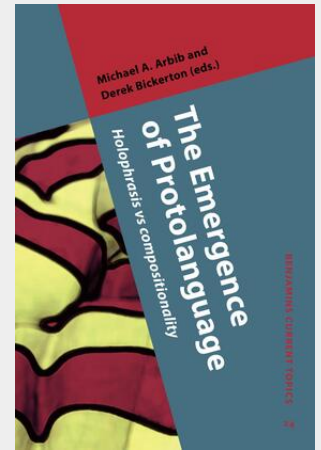


The Emergence of Protolanguage

Holophrasis vs compositionality

Somewhere and somehow, in the 5 to 7 million years since the last common ancestors of humans and the great apes, our ancestors "got" language. The authors of this volume all agree that there was no single mutation or cultural innovation that took our ancestors directly from a limited system of a few vocalizations (primarily innate) and gestures (some learned) to language. They further agree to use the term "protolanguage" for the beginnings of an open system of symbolic communication that provided the bridge to the use of fully expressive languages, rich in both lexicon and grammar. But here consensus ends, and the theories presented here range from the compositional view that protolanguage was based primarily on words akin to the nouns and verbs, etc., we know today with only syntax lacking to the holophrastic view that protolanguage used protowords which had no meaningful subunits which might nonetheless refer to complex but significantly recurrent events. The present volume does not decide the matter but it does advance our understanding. The lack of any direct archaeological record of protolanguage might seem to raise insuperable difficulties. However, this volume exhibits the diversity of methodologies that can be brought to bear in developing datasets that can be used to advance the debate. These articles were originally published as Interaction Studies 9:1 (2008).



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