The Evolution of Language

Language, more than anything else, is what makes us human. It appears that no communication system of equivalent power exists elsewhere in the animal kingdom. Any normal human child will learn a language based on rather sparse data in the surrounding world, while even the brightest chimpanzee, exposed to the same environment, will not. Why not? How, and why, did language evolve in our species and not in others? Since Darwin's theory of evolution, questions about the origin of language have generated a rapidly growing scientific literature, stretched across a number of disciplines, much of it directed at specialist audiences. The diversity of perspectives – from linguistics, anthropology, speech science, genetics, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology – can be bewildering. Covering diverse and fascinating topics, from Kaspar Hauser to Clever Hans, Tecumseh Fitch provides a clear and comprehensible guide to this vast literature, bringing together its most important insights to explore one of the biggest unsolved puzzles of human history.

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Dedicated to my father

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