Ideophones and the Evolution of Language

Ideophones have been recognized in modern linguistics at least since 1935, but they still lie far outside the concerns of mainstream (Western) linguistic debate, in part because they are most richly attested in relatively unstudied (often unwritten) languages. The evolution of language, on the other hand, has recently become a fashionable topic, but all speculations so far have been almost totally data-free. Without disputing the tenet that there are no primitive languages, this book argues that ideophones may be an atavistic throwback to an earlier stage of communication, where sounds and gestures were paired in what can justifiably be called a ‘prelinguistic’ fashion. The structure of ideophones may also provide answers to deeper questions, among them how communicative gestures may themselves have emerged from practical actions. Moreover, their current distribution and behavior provide hints as to how they may have become conventional words in languages with conventional rules.

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For my stouthearted SEALs:
Nina (“Not on my watch!”) Haiman
and
Claire Haiman, Maker of Lists
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Acknowledgments

For sustenance: In the spring of 2003, expected funding for a sabbatical year suddenly vanished. Panicked, I responded to vague rumors I had heard about the largesse of the Max-Planck Institute, and made a distraught appeal to Bernard Comrie. His protocol-waiving response was instant. The first draft of this book was accordingly completed while I was a visiting resident scholar at the Max-Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, in Leipzig, in 2003–4. My profound thanks go to Bernard and to the staff there, for their unforgettable generosity and hospitality.

For correction, and reading portions of this manuscript that trespassed on their areas of linguistic expertise, my thanks to Mark Dingemanse, Martha Ratliff, Jeffrey Heath, Bernhard Wälchli, Paul Newman, Philip Jaggar, John Hutchison, and James Stanford. For helpful leads on Indo-European, Hungarian, Chinese, Ndyuka, Supyire, and ASL, my thanks to Jay Jasanoﬀ, Istvan Kenesei, Edith Moravcsik, Sandra Thompson, Norval Smith, Robert Carlson, and Sherman Wilcox. In writing about gesture for the ﬁrst time in my life, I am especially grateful for the generous and stimulating scrutiny of David McNeill, who read both the original book proposal and the entire ﬁnal manuscript for Cambridge University Press.

For the inspiration of their example, I salute:

David Huntley. He was the ﬁrst linguist I ever knew, and ﬁfty years ago he taught us all (it was an obligatory course, for Russian majors) Old Church Slavonic. Asked once what was the use of linguistics, he answered that if he had been an incompetent engineer, he could have designed a faulty bridge and been responsible for the deaths of hundreds. But as an incompetent linguist, he inﬂicted nothing worse than boredom for any of his mistakes. He was more than crazy enough and brilliant enough to compensate for the inherent tedium of OCS;

Ken Gregerson. It was nearly forty years ago, on a cold winter night in Winnipeg, that I heard him present a talk on sound symbolism in Rengao, a paper that is cited here as Gregerson (1984). It was then, and still is now, the most electrifying talk I have ever heard.
Acknowledgments

Joseph Greenberg. It was a mere thirty-odd years ago, while I was avidly pursuing him to contribute a talk to a conference I was convening, that we met at his office. He had just read Darmesteter, of whom I had never heard, and enthusiastically introduced me to *La vie des mots*. He was like a kid with a new toy.