
***Homo erectus*, symbols and the origin of language: 60,000 generations of human language**

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How and when did human language begin? One common proposal is that the languages of our species appeared suddenly between 150,000 and 250,000 years ago. The evidence in favor of this hypothesis is relatively fragile, but it generally assumes that symbols originated with art while grammar emerged alongside more complex tool development of *sapiens*. According to this hypothesis, other species of our genus *Homo*, such as *erectus* and *neanderthalensis*, became extinct because they lacked language and, therefore, were unable to compete successfully with *sapiens*. In this lecture, we will reexamine the archaeological evidence and via this evidence defend an alternative hypothesis, namely, that human language appeared gradually, at least 3 million years ago. The record begins with icons collected by *Australopithecus africanus* and proceeds to symbols, first appearing with *Homo erectus*, some 2 million years ago. We consider the evolution of the human brain, vocal apparatus, and human semiotics (from a Peircean perspective). We will define language as the transmission of information via triadic symbols (not dyadic symbols as in the Saussurian system) and conclude that *Homo sapiens* was born into a linguistic world. We will see that grammar emerged from symbols and not vice-versa. We will additionally conclude that grammar is merely a part (and not a major part at that) of human language, arising from the more important symbols. We will present a variety of examples from other species, such as bird song patterns, sign use by other great apes, and we will conclude that non-symbolic systems (as all non-human communication systems seem to be) have no direct relation to the evolution of human language. As we will finally learn, with the gradual appearance of language, based on the growth and development of cognition and culture in humans, it is superfluous to propose baroque proposals such as genetic linguistic mutations or any “universal grammar”.