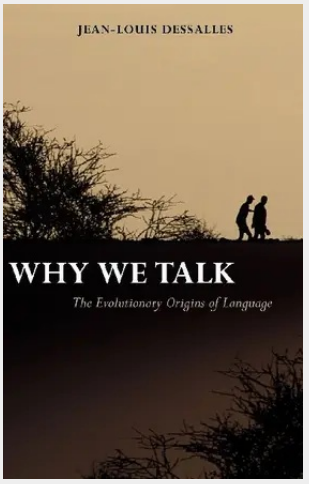
Dessalles

Why We Talk

The Evolutionary Origins of Language



Jean-Louis Dessalles explores the co-evolutionary paths of biology, culture, and the great human edifice of language, linking the evolution of the language to the general evolutionary history of humankind. He provides searchingly original answers to such fundamental paradoxes as to whether we acquired our greatest gift in order to talk or so as to be able to think, and as to why human beings should, as experience constantly confirms, contribute information for the well-being of others at their own expense and for no apparent gain: which if this is one of language's main functions appears to make its possession, in Darwinian terms, a disadvantage. Dr Dessalles looks for solutions in the early history of human species and considers the degree to which language evolved as a means of choosing profitable coalition partners and maximizing individual success within a competitive social environment. The author opens with a discussion of the differences between animal and human communication and the biological foundations of language. He looks at the physiological preconditions for language evolution and the early evolution of meaning and communication. He then embarks on an important and original account of the natural history of conversation. Here he considers the roles of language in supporting social cohesion and information exchange. This challenging and original account will appeal to all those interested in the origins of language and the evolution of human behaviour.

Constant exchange of information is integral to our societies. Jean-Louis Dessalles explores how this came into being. He develops a view of language as an instrument for conversation rather than mental representation and thought. Presenting language evolution as a natural history of conversation, the author sheds light on the emergence of communication in the hominine congregations, as well as on the human nature.

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