

the authors instead embrace a focus on unconscious phenomena, such as repression. Finally, chapter 6 suggests the psychoanalytic concept of identification in place of identity and links the study of language and desire to broader political movements.

The publication of a textbook on this long-marginalized topic is welcome. Yet the volume may mislead readers new to the field because of its partisan perspective. Although the authors occasionally acknowledge identity as part of sexuality, their position is ambivalent at best. Their overwhelming focus is on desire as an alternative rather than an addendum to identity, a viewpoint encapsulated in the recommendation to 'leave [identity] behind and forget about it for a while' (p. 105). The authors rightly emphasize desire as an aspect of sexuality that deserves greater attention from linguists. However, as we have discussed elsewhere, sexual desire is always articulated through complex processes of identity positioning. Indeed, to have or express a sexual desire is to take up or be assigned a sexual subject position. Such processes are not restricted to intentional acts of self-labelling – the focus of Cameron and Kulick's critique – but rather are produced and negotiated ideologically. (The authors' vigorous objections to identity are particularly surprising since much of their own previous research relies so heavily upon the concept; it may be for this reason that the book is sometimes inconsistent on this point.)

The authors base their critique on the incorrect assumption that linking linguistic practice to identity is essentialist. More current research on language and sexuality avoids essentialism by drawing on anthropological theories of indexicality and performativity. Yet Cameron and Kulick's literature review overlooks this theoretical move. By critiquing a few studies and positing these as representative, the authors take an oppositional stand to the entire field, thus missing an opportunity to make common cause with researchers who share many of their theoretical and political commitments.

Although the authors state that they seek to broaden language and sexuality research, their privileging of the erotic excludes vital areas of sexual life. Indeed, many aspects of sexuality do not necessarily involve sexual desire at all, such as reproduction and rape. Sexuality is better conceptualized as a broad set of ideologies, practices, and identities, which together give sociopolitical meaning to the body as an eroticized and/or reproductive site. Such an approach imagines the field of language and sexuality as an inclusive, diverse, and culturally grounded intellectual project. By contrast, the authors' stated goal of moving 'beyond' identity and toward desire unwittingly strips away the social and cultural location of sexual subjectivity.

Despite its flaws, this ambitious book takes an important first step in ushering in the next stage of language and sexuality research. By adding their voice to recent work calling attention to the linguistic dimensions of sexuality, Cameron and Kulick help legitimize this topic. To the authors' credit, they do not simply summarize previous work but offer fruitful research directions, most notably a greater consideration of desire. Another strength is the volume's collaborative nature: the influence of Cameron, a leading feminist linguist, is evident in the inclusion of a feminist perspective that enriches the argument, while Kulick's anthropological background adds a needed cross-cultural dimension. *Language and sexuality* will no doubt inspire researchers to greater theoretical sophistication and a more critical perspective on desire, identity, and sexuality. Both students and scholars will find this highly readable volume provocative and controversial, but never dull.

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CHRISTIANSEN, MORTEN H. & SIMON KIRBY (eds). *Language evolution*. xvii, 395 pp., figs, tables, bibliogr. Oxford: Univ. Press, 2003. £60.00 (cloth), £17.99 (paper)

Despite its title, this volume is not concerned with how languages evolve. Its topic is a quite different question: the evolutionary emergence of language in our species. Debates in this area have been notoriously fractious, and this wide-ranging collection gives an accurate picture of the current interdisciplinary state of play.

The book consists of seventeen chapters written by twenty-one authors. The editors' opening chapter surveys the difficulties facing scholars in addressing what may be 'the hardest problem in science'. In the second chapter, however, Steven Pinker is already undermining the editors' whole approach: language is a biological adaptation like any other, he argues, and evolved in the normal Darwinian way. There is therefore no 'hard problem' at all. James Hurford agrees that language is part of human biology. But he views it also as embedded in uniquely human social and cultural processes, the details of its evolution remaining elusive at best. Simon Kirby and Morten Christiansen concur that a complete theory of language evolution will necessarily be multi-faceted: 'We should not expect a single mechanism to do all the work'. Frederick Newmeyer surveys a range of recent evolutionary scenarios, bringing out

their mutual incompatibility. Derek Bickerton insists that fully fledged syntactical speech emerged from its predecessor in a sudden leap. Michael Tomasello argues that no dedicated language faculty ever evolved – the core relevant adaptation was simply for ‘understanding others on analogy with the self’. Terrence Deacon argues that syntactical universals are neither genetic nor cultural but best conceptualized on the model of mathematical principles, destined to be discovered once symbols begin to be used.

In the only archaeological contribution, Iain Davidson touches on human use of red ochre pigments from at least 70,000 years ago, describing this African development as the earliest firm evidence for symbolism. Instead of explaining the relevance of pigments to language, however, he concludes simply with a list of questions. Marc Hauser and Tecumseh Fitch argue that there is nothing special or puzzling about human vocal-auditory capacities as similar adaptations are found widely in nature. For Philip Lieberman, by contrast, distinctively linguistic syntax evolved as a by-product of our species’ unique and unprecedented ‘neural capacity freely to alter the sequence of muscle commands that generate phonemes’. Pointing to ‘mirror neurons’ for visually guided grasping – located in brain regions in monkeys which correspond to Broca’s area in humans – Michael Arbib infers that language evolution must have gone through a gestural stage, an argument echoed by Michael Corballis. Robin Dunbar, however, is adamant that ‘gestural theories of language origins do not make sense’. As claim follows counterclaim, it becomes obvious that something is wrong.

Part of the problem may be that this book professes to be interdisciplinary when in reality it is not. Readers of this journal in particular are likely to feel alienated. *Language evolution* is in fact a victim of the ‘two cultures’ divide, with perspectives from the humanities and social sciences systematically excluded. There is little or no pragmatics or sociolinguistics, nor any serious engagement with up-to-date linguistic philosophy. Neither is there any engagement with the latest debates in palaeoanthropology or behavioural ecology. Recent developments in Darwinian signal evolution theory – for example, Amotz Zahavi’s celebrated ‘Handicap Principle’ – might as well not have happened.

As a result of all this, language is still treated, Chomsky-style, as if in a vacuum, and isolated from evolving human strategies of reproduction, foraging, alliance-formation, exchange, contractual obligation, sex, politics, and power. Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the contributors fail to address what is surely the key question – that of honesty versus deception in signalling. Primates including humans are political, sexual,

‘Machiavellian’ agents. Words are cheap and easy to fake. Since signals of this kind are intrinsically unreliable, in nature they never evolve. Even within a postulated ancestral hominid population they would not work; indeed, they would appear completely irrelevant in the absence of distinctively human public standards of in-group honesty and trust.

The fact that humans alone rely on symbols cannot be explained in narrowly biological or mechanistic terms. As Roy Rappaport taught us in his *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (1999), in the beginning was ‘the Word’ – a speech-act whose authority was unquestionable. Communicative use of symbols would carry no weight in the absence of sacred rituals designed to generate the necessary group-level co-operation and trust. A narrowly technical theory of the evolution of language is therefore a misguided project. The whole approach simply dooms scholars to unending conflict over which particular ‘magic ingredient X’ caused language to arise. On this basis, there can be no solution. Sobering as it may seem, for the wider anthropological community this negative conclusion might well be experienced as exhilarating. It means that no solution will emerge short of a ‘theory of everything’ – a testable, robust, and conceptually unifying theory of the evolution of distinctively human culture and consciousness as a whole.

Despite the obvious problems, Kirby and Christiansen do their best to present *Language evolution* as a step forward. Their volume was designed, they inform us in the opening chapter, as ‘a definitive book on the subject’, featuring ‘the big names in every discipline that has a stake in answering these questions’. So what do we now know that we didn’t know before? ‘Possibly the strongest point of consensus’, the editors conclude, ‘is the notion that to fully understand language evolution, it must be approached simultaneously from many different disciplines’. As interpreted by Christiansen and Kirby, unfortunately, this commendable principle apparently licensed an assortment of ‘big names’ to approach ‘the hardest problem’ from multiple directions at speed. Whatever the value of each contribution, the overall impression remains that of a serious motorway collision.

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DE ANGELIS, ROSE (ed.) *Between anthropology and literature: interdisciplinary discourse*. x, 180 pp., bibliogr. London, New York: Routledge Harwood, 2002. £50.00 (cloth)

As Rose De Angelis writes, the purpose of the book is to question the validity of a strict