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The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention

Guy Deutscher

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Guy Deutscher : The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Subject, Sparkling Presentation -- A Terrific Book. By Anne Mills This is one of the best and most exciting books I've ever read on language (I'm not a professional, but I am

a devotee). Deutscher's focus, as the title makes clear, is the way in which language could have emerged. This has to be speculative in part, since we are never going to find a fossil of the first noun. But Deutscher's approach is solid and convincing: he looks at the way languages grow and change at present, to deduce what may have happened in the past. In doing so, he considers the ways in which language itself could have emerged and why it may have evolved in certain ways. He does not focussing on the narrower issues of the emergence and development of specific languages, which is what most historical linguistics book I have read seem to do. In addition to its fascinating subject matter and compelling research, this book is delightfully written. That's not a word I usually throw around in discussing books about language, many of which are written for an academic audience, and show it. But Deutscher is a lovely writer, which only reinforces my enthusiasm for this book. I like this book so much that I emailed the author to express my gratitude and appreciation. How often does one send fan mail to linguists? 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great introduction into evolutionary linguistics By David H. Rubin Mr. Deutscher does the layman a great service in introducing us to some of the difficult ideas about the history of languages and their evolutionary development over the ages. He takes us far beyond the Grimm's law and explains highly technical notions in a way we can understand with a bit of effort. Much of the book is devoted to the question, "If languages seem to be getting simpler and simpler over time, what caused them to become complex to begin with?" The answer appears to lie in the analogy with earth geology's erosion and sedimentation. The only thing I found lacking was a linkage to real world history, outside of the language context. That is, what was happening in the world while certain language developments were taking place. That must be the subject of another book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Phenomenal book written with incredible wit, humor, erudition and intelligence By Kindle Customer A phenomenal book on the evolution of human language written with incredible wit and humor, as well as great erudition and intelligence. Highly recommend this book for anyone interested in learning how and why language changes over the ages. As a speaker of both English and a Semitic language I found this book especially interesting as these are two language family groups that the author goes into a great deal of detail about. I would, however, have appreciated more references to the tonal languages of Asia as I know nothing of their grammar and wonder if this language family undergoes the same processes the Semitic and Indo-European languages do.

Blending the spirit of *Eats, Shoots Leaves* with the science of *The Language Instinct*, an original inquiry into the development of that most essential-and mysterious-of human creations: Language Language is mankind's greatest invention-except, of course, that it was never invented." So begins linguist Guy Deutscher's enthralling investigation into the genesis and evolution of language. If we started off with rudimentary utterances on the level of "man throw spear," how did we end up with sophisticated grammars, enormous vocabularies, and intricately nuanced degrees of meaning? Drawing on recent groundbreaking discoveries in modern linguistics, Deutscher exposes the elusive forces of creation at work in human communication, giving us fresh insight into how language emerges, evolves, and decays. He traces the evolution of linguistic complexity from an early "Me Tarzan" stage to such elaborate single-word constructions as the Turkish *sehir lilestiremediklerim izdensiniz* ("you are one of those whom we couldn't turn into a town dweller"). Arguing that destruction and creation in language are intimately entwined, Deutscher shows how these processes are continuously in operation, generating new words, new structures, and new meanings. As entertaining as it is erudite, *The Unfolding of Language* moves nimbly from ancient Babylonian to American idiom, from the central role of metaphor to the staggering triumph of design that is the Semitic verb, to tell the dramatic story and explain the genius behind a uniquely human faculty.

From Publishers Weekly Using language himself in a lively and engaging way, Deutscher, an expert in Semitic languages at the University of Leiden in Holland, identifies two principles: the desire to create order out of chaotic reality, and the urge to vary the sounds of words and their meanings providing the direction by which language developed and continues to develop. Rather than search for the prehistoric moment when speech originated, Deutscher says we can most profitably understand the phenomenon by taking the present as the key to the past. Using a wide array of examples, he delves into the back-formation of words (making a noun into a verb), the evolution of relative clauses from simple pointing words (that, this) and the turning of objects into nouns. On the question of whether language is innate, Deutscher takes a middle path, asserting that our brains are wired for basic language, but that linguistic complexity is brought about by cultural evolution. Deutscher's entertaining writing and his knack for telling a good tale about how words develop offer a delightful and charming story of language. (June 1) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist The linguistic chain that connects the boasts of an ancient Sumerian monarch to the jests of Groucho Marx is long and convoluted, but Deutscher retraces it, fascinating link by fascinating link, identifying the dynamic processes that have continuously transformed and renewed the world's diverse languages. Even when delving deeply into ancient manuscripts and temple engravings, Deutscher interprets every linguistic mutation as the consequence of evolutionary forces still observable in today's living languages. Readers see in linguistic fossils from Mesopotamia traces of the same conversion of living metaphor into conceptual lattice still taking place in modern English, German, and Indonesian.

What Deutscher demonstrates most clearly is how linguistic structures that look like the product of deliberate artifice can emerge from entirely natural processes. Predictably, when he probes the linguistic developments before the advent of writing, the author must frequently substitute his own speculations for solid evidence. Entailing just enough technical detail to tempt readers into professional sources (listed at the book's conclusion), this introduction to fundamental linguistic principles opens to nonspecialists a rich theoretical vista. Bryce Christensen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved A lively and thought-provoking exploration of why language change appears to be haphazard yet is fundamentally orderly. Exciting, witty, and a masterpiece of contemporary scholarship. Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and English, Stanford University At last, an entertaining and readable book that presents the most current views on language and its evolution. Joan Bybee, Professor of Linguistics, University of New Mexico Thoroughly enjoyable... Guy Deutscher is an erudite and entertaining guide through the paradoxes and complexities of language evolution. Gene Gragg, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Chicago