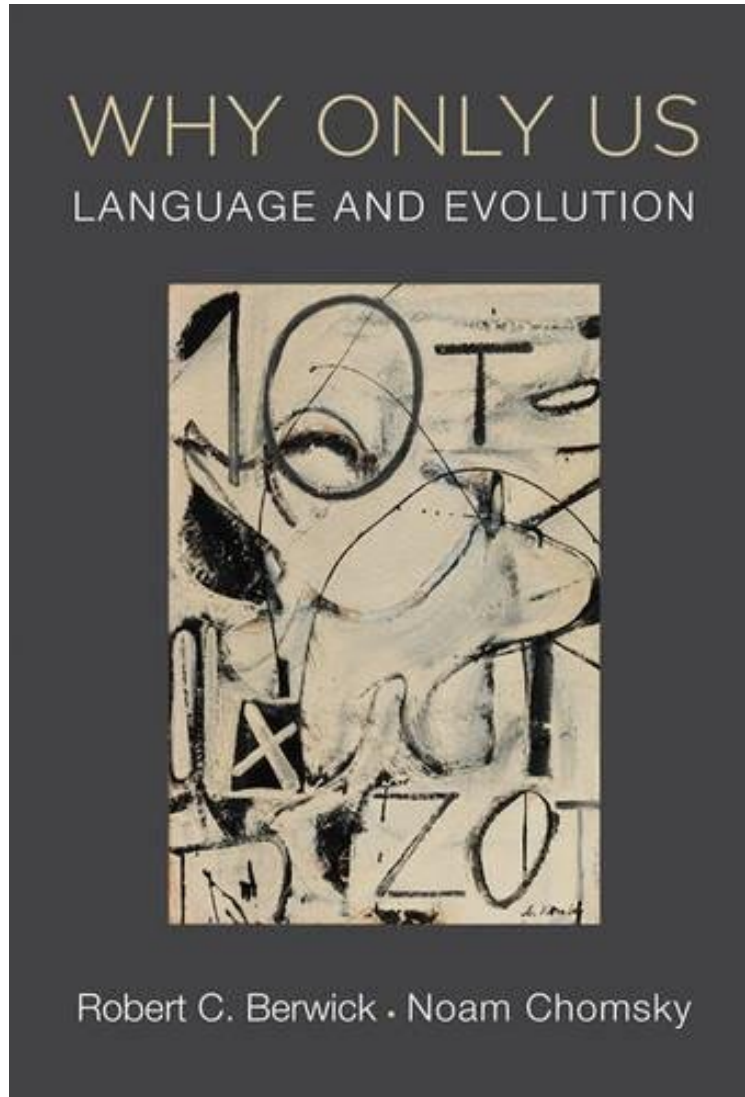


[Download ebook] Why Only Us: Language and Evolution (MIT Press)

Why Only Us: Language and Evolution (MIT Press)

Robert C. Berwick, Noam Chomsky
*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#307226 in Books imusti 2015-12-30Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.00 x .56 x 5.381, .0 #File Name: 0262034247224 pagesMIT University Press Group Ltd | File size: 44.Mb

Robert C. Berwick, Noam Chomsky : Why Only Us: Language and Evolution (MIT Press) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why Only Us: Language and Evolution (MIT Press):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great for a general audience (like yours truly)By AlephZenA lovely read. Great for a general audience (like yours truly). Technical but never beyond lay comprehension. Enjoyed it tremendously.15 of 18 people found the following review helpful. A short monograph well worth reading for its bold thesis. Not to be dismissed offhand by dogmatic adaptationistsBy TomI enjoyed this. Their discussion of misconceptions about evolution, though quite general and abstract, was very good. They emphasised the importance of

"stochastic processes" very nicely, and I agree with both the authors that there is a substantial amount of dogmatism involved in the strong adaptationist view (and in the charge that Chomsky is being in some way "mystical" for presenting a story of sudden emergence for language). The evidence adduced in favour of their hypothesis was also quite strong overall, with all ground covered to at least some degree: comparative evidence in primates, neuroscience (with several pictures included), genetics, the hierarchical, computationally efficient nature of language etc. Here are some flaws: the book is slight, and repetitive; sometimes the hypothesis they are putting forward is spoken about in categorical terms, as if it is not a hypothesis at all but a rigorous theory (I get the feeling that these moments of high modality are Chomsky speaking); and Chomsky's defence of the hierarchical, non-linear nature of language (as contrasted with birdsong, for example) is supported by only two English sentences, one of which he has been trotting out in speeches for several years (the sentence "Instinctively, eagles that fly swim", where "Instinctively" binds "swim" rather than "fly").

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Larry BlumenTough slog, but mind expanding. Makes me want to theorize again.

Berwick and Chomsky draw on recent developments in linguistic theory to offer an evolutionary account of language and humans' remarkable, species-specific ability to acquire it. "A loosely connected collection of four essays that will fascinate anyone interested in the extraordinary phenomenon of language." -- New York Review of Books

We are born crying, but those cries signal the first stirring of language. Within a year or so, infants master the sound system of their language; a few years after that, they are engaging in conversations. This remarkable, species-specific ability to acquire any human language -- "the language faculty" -- raises important biological questions about language, including how it has evolved. This book by two distinguished scholars -- a computer scientist and a linguist -- addresses the enduring question of the evolution of language.

Robert Berwick and Noam Chomsky explain that until recently the evolutionary question could not be properly posed, because we did not have a clear idea of how to define "language" and therefore what it was that had evolved. But since the Minimalist Program, developed by Chomsky and others, we know the key ingredients of language and can put together an account of the evolution of human language and what distinguishes us from all other animals.

Berwick and Chomsky discuss the biolinguistic perspective on language, which views language as a particular object of the biological world; the computational efficiency of language as a system of thought and understanding; the tension between Darwin's idea of gradual change and our contemporary understanding about evolutionary change and language; and evidence from nonhuman animals, in particular vocal learning in songbirds.

Explaining the origins of the unique is famously difficult. Through elegantly showing the simplicity of the underlying mechanism, Berwick and Chomsky adroitly surmount this problem in the case of that most remarkable of all human uniquenesses, our possession of language. (Ian Tattersall, author of *The Strange Case of the Rickety Cossack: And Other Cautionary Tales from Human Evolution*)

Nothing talks like humans do. Nothing even comes close. This sets up an interesting evolutionary problem: how did this unique capacity arise in the species? Unfortunately, approaching this question intelligently requires combining skills that seldom travel in tandem. Linguists know a lot about the principal features of human language but little about how evolution works, and biologists know a lot about how evolution works but little about the distinctive properties of human language. Enter Berwick and Chomsky's marvelous little book. In a mere four lucid and easily accessible chapters they educate linguists about the central mechanisms driving evolution and bring biologists up to date on the key distinctive features of natural language. Anyone interested in this topic must read this book. (Norbert Hornstein, Professor, Department of Linguistics, University of Maryland)

Berwick and Chomsky, masters of language and computer science, make a daring proposition: the phenomenon 'human language' arose when the brain evolved to instantiate the simple operation 'Merge.' At this crucial moment the complex trait, which led to a new mode of evolution, fell into place. The book is captivating and a must for everyone interested in evolution and humans. It is a landmark that will define future research. (Martin Nowak, Professor of Mathematics and Biology, Harvard University)

This book totally redefines the debate on the evolution of language. By judiciously incorporating recent advances in the theory of evolution and in linguistic theory, Berwick and Chomsky present a decisive case for the rapid emergence of language in the species. A witty and engaging introduction to language from a biological perspective, this is science writing at its best. (Stephen Crain, Distinguished Professor, Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, and Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders)

Why Only Us: Language and Evolution is a loosely connected collection of four essays that will fascinate anyone interested in the extraordinary phenomenon of language. (New York Review of Books)

About the Author Robert C. Berwick is Professor of Computational Linguistics and Computer Science and Engineering, in the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems and the Institute for Data, Systems, and Society at MIT and the author of *Computational Complexity and Natural Language* and *The Acquisition of Syntactic Knowledge*, both published by the MIT Press.