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Sommario/riassunto

The contributors to this volume are linguists, psychologists, neuroscientists, primatologists, and anthropologists who share the assumption that language, just as mind and brain, are products of biological evolution. The rise of human language is not viewed as a serendipitous mutation that gave birth to a unique linguistic organ, but as a gradual, adaptive extension of pre-existing mental capacities and brain structures. The contributors carefully study brain mechanisms, diachronic change, language acquisition, and the parallels between cognitive and linguistic structures to weave a web of hypotheses and suggestive empirical findings on the origins of language and the connections of language to other human capacities. The chapters discuss brain pathways that support linguistic processing; origins of specific linguistic features in temporal and hierarchical structures of the mind; the possible co-evolution of language and the reasoning about mental states; and the aspects of language learning that may serve as models of evolutionary change.
