

are far too disparate to account for the evolutionary creation of a faculty that was as novel, as complex, and as integrated as language.

The idea that language is involved in the establishment of social bonding seems self-evident. However, when we look for support for that idea with a view to explaining the emergence of language as we know it, no explanation from the usefulness of social cohesion stands up to examination. The role played by language in social bonding or as a way of controlling the doings of members of the group is not up to explaining language behaviour as a whole. The inadequacy of the explanation from social bonding becomes even more blatant if we accept the fact that language, even when it serves to comment upon the behaviour of others, is an altruistic activity.

16.2 The altruistic character of language

Who benefits from language? If we judge by the pleasure people take in talking, language does as much good to those who speak as to those who listen. However, this is not the place to canvass psychological motivations. Biological motivations are what concern us, for these are what can create selection pressure. The only 'benefit' to be considered is therefore any consequence of conversational behaviour which is positively correlated with the survival and reproduction of individuals, without taking into account any other effect. The pleasure or displeasure associated with any particular behaviour is itself the product of evolution and not its source. In our genetic equipment, pleasure and displeasure are ways of broadly controlling behaviours. If conversational behaviour affords some pleasure to interlocutors, the reason is that the behaviour was once biologically of use to our ancestors and continues to be of use to us. If we are to understand what such use might consist of, we must ask again: Who benefits from language?

If we consider the mode of communication that we defined as protohuman, which consists essentially of drawing attention to salient situations, the answer seems immediate and obvious: acts of communication benefit hearers. Any speakers who take the trouble to point out a salient happening or phenomenon are providing their fellows with potentially valuable information. In this context, the adjective 'valuable' has a biological meaning, that is to say the speaker is passing on to others