

Metaphor Drives Compositional Structure in Proto-Language

T. Mark Ellison & Uta Reinöhl

Bickerton (2014) suggests that protolanguage consisted of analytic signs, with conventionalised structures developing from ad-hoc collocations. In contrast, Wray (2000) and Arbib (2012) propose a system of holistic signs, with compositional constructions developed by fractionating chance parallels between semantics and form.

We propose a middle path between these accounts, with an initial vocabulary of varying levels of semantic complexity. Collocations are interpreted by unifying the meanings of their component words, e.g. we might have one word meaning *hunt-for-food* and another meaning *food-animal* which used together mean *hunt-for-food-animal*. Cultural complexification engendered more metaphorical collocations: one could imagine *hunt-for-food* creatively combined with *happiness* in order to say *hunt-for-happiness*. Metaphorical collocations require components to be expressed explicitly - they cannot be supplied by context (Reinöhl 2016). We show that this obligatoriness is the launching pad for structures with increasing compositionality, such as phrasal structures and complex morphology.