

PREFACE

My fascination with language origins goes back at least to the 1980s when some students and faculty members from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan used to get together periodically for very informal evening seminars on topics of human evolution. More than once, archeologists turned to me, the only linguist in the group, and asked "When did language begin?" I could do nothing except look blank and say "I dunno," but the question prodded me into thinking about how it all might have started. This book is the result of that thinking.

Over the years, many friends, colleagues, and correspondents offered their wise counsel as I worked on various articles on the subject (some of which form the basis of sections in the book and are listed in the Acknowledgements below) and I must again give my thanks to A. L. Becker, Derek Bickerton, Paul Bloom, Loring Brace, William Croft, Iain Davidson, Penelope Eckert, Mark V. Flinn, Allan Gibbard, Virginia Guilford, Barbara King, Chris Knight, Frank Livingstone, Bruce Mannheim, John Mitani, Thomas Moylan, Emanuel Polioudakis, Ernst Pulgram, Roy Rappaport, Robert Seyfarth, Michael Tomasello, Virginia Vitzthum, Ron Wallace, and Richard Wrangham.

Some of these same people, and many others as well, have helped in one way or another with the book itself. I will never overcome my astonishment at the generosity of scholars, several of whom I know only through e-mail, who have responded to my pleas for help. Simon Kirby and Jim Hurford have on several occasions done their best to help me understand work on the computer simulation of language evolution. Judy Kegl not only answered my questions and sent me papers, but sent me a stunning tape about young Nicaraguan signers. Another stunning tape, this one about bonobos, was sent by Sue Savage-Rumbaugh. Adam Kendon helped me to understand the differences between various kinds of gestures. William Irons brought me up to date on the relation between status and reproductive success, and Judith Irvine did the same for the relation between status and valued