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Introduction

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As part of the continuing growth and diversification of *Language and Cognition,* this special double issue focuses on the evolution of language. Although this controversial topic has been discussed for centuries from different perspectives, it is probably safe to say that genuine progress has only begun to take place during the past 25 years or so, as increasing numbers of researchers have started pooling a broad array of relevant ideas and discoveries from a tremendous range of disciplines, including, in alphabetical order, anthropology, archeology, artificial life, biology, cognitive science, genetics, linguistics, modeling, neuroscience, paleontology, primatology, and psychology. The rapid expansion and maturation of this field of inquiry is evident in several ways. Since 1990, more and more articles about the evolution of language have appeared in prominent, high-ranking journals such as *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Trends in Cognitive Sciences, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science,* and *Frontiers in Evolutionary Neuroscience.* In addition, the publication of books on this topic has been on the rise, and there is now a whole series of impressive monographs under the rubric "Oxford Studies in the Evolution of Language." Furthermore, beginning in 1996, the International Conference on the Evolution of Language has been held every other year to provide a public forum for the presentation and evaluation of new developments (http://www.evolang.org/).

The aim of this special double issue is to give readers a unique window onto some recent advances in this exciting multidisciplinary field. Inspired by the format of *Current Anthropology* and *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* the lead paper is a précis of Michael Arbib's 2012 book entitled *How the brain got language: The Mirror System Hypothesis* (this is the 16th monograph in the Oxford series mentioned above). Although the framework that Arbib has constructed is only one of several accounts that are currently being debated, it stands out from most of the others in the breadth of the phenomena that it attempts to explain, in the amount of theoretical and empirical work that it draws upon, and in the coherence of the overall, multi-step story. Following the précis of the book, there are 12

commentaries that have been specially commissioned by experts in the wide spectrum of disciplines that are relevant to Arbib's framework. And following those commentaries, there is a detailed response from Arbib.

Given that the evolution of language is an inherently fascinating topic that has been attracting the attention of a growing number of scientists, and given that this topic is treated here from many different vantage points, there should be something of interest for everyone!