

Preface

As an undergraduate student, I studied biology and philosophy at the University of Mainz and felt drawn to topics that relate cognitive phenomena to biological mechanisms. I felt as of today particularly inspired by the work of Derek Bickerton, Noam Chomsky, Charles Darwin, Hoimar von Ditfurth, Paul Feyerabend, Jerry Fodor, Eric Lenneberg, Karl Popper, and William van O. Quine.

After graduate studies at the Goethe University Frankfurt and RWTH Aachen University, I published my first book in German entitled *Mental Representations of Word Meanings*. Subsequently, I worked as post-doc at the Centre Paul Broca in Paris and EHESS and in Massachusetts at Boston University and MIT. Just before the reunification in Germany, I published my second German book *Language Structures and Knowledge Representations*. I resumed my work on the science of language at the University of Manchester, Science and Technology in England and at the University of California in San Diego. The autobiographical fragment serves here to acknowledge the institutions that provided support to my work.

The nature of language, aka the neurobiological foundations of language, play a major role in the nature of language. The present book hopes to raise even more attention to this challenging but exciting interdisciplinary research area. Today, new empirical research comes out in large amounts faster than ever. Thus, I must admit that the selected topics are my subjective preference, and I am certain not to have addressed all research relevant to the questions and issues raised. Thus, I did not come close to an exhaustive survey of the literature referring to the nature of language. However, hopefully I presented sufficiently enough to illuminate how these interdisciplinary approaches in this field work and why it is actually a fascinating approach. Keeping this in mind let me introduce “The Nature of Language” with a modified aphorism by Hoimar von Ditfurth (1972, p. 245): “*We are, to put it in this way, in fact the *H. erectus of tomorrow.*”¹

San Diego, California
December 2013

Dieter Hillert

¹ In: H. v. Ditfurth (1972). *Im Anfang war der Wasserstoff* [German]. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe. The original quote used Neanderthals instead of *H. erectus*.

The Nature of Language

Evolution, Paradigms and Circuits

Hillert, D.

2014, XV, 201 p. 89 illus., 55 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4939-0608-6