

Vocal abilities in humans and nonhuman apes: Rethinking some assumptions in the evolution of language

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When reasoning about the evolution of language, it is often assumed that 1) nonhuman apes lack the ability for learning and voluntary control of vocal and breathing-related behavior, and 2) human apes lack the ability to produce iconically grounded (i.e., “motivated”) vocalizations. This talk will present two lines of research that challenge these assumptions: the first concerning the vocal abilities of an enculturated gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*), and the second concerning the vocal abilities of university undergraduates (*Homo sapiens universitius*). I will discuss the implications of this research for theories of language evolution and ultimately suggest that language evolved from multimodal origins.