ABSTRACT

TITLE:	The Antiquity of Language: A Review of the Evidence
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ABSTRACT: The holy grail of many scientific inquiries has been the discovery of the precise evolutionary progression for the faculty of modern language. It is a remarkable question that has persisted since before Charles Darwin's publication of his theory of evolution by natural selection in 1859. Since Darwin, the popular premise that language was and is a uniquely human feature has remained largely unchanged. However, the recent advancements in genetics and ever increasing cache of archaeological material has begged for a reinterpretation according to some scientists. Dediu and Levinson (2013) claim that modern language is phylogenetically ancient and was a part of the modern human and Neandertal lineage at least a half a million years ago, beginning roughly at the time of divergence from the last common ancestor Homo heidelbergensis. Yet, this time frame is significantly older than the typical and widely accepted assumption of 50-100,000 years as proposed by the likes of renowned linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky, like others (e.g. Berwick et al., 2013; Tattersall, 2010), propose that the cognitive abilities for language were overly limited or non-existent outside of Homo sapiens and therefore language must have necessarily originated with the early human species. Nevertheless, Dediu and Levinson (2013) purport that the recent amalgam of evidence supports an evolutionary history antithetic to a simple and solitary progression of modern language that is strictly confined to Homo sapiens. They suggest that the evidence articulates a diverse evolutionary history where Neandertals and ancient modern humans shared genes and culture on a wholly significant level and because of this intimate interrelatedness and common evolutionary descent, Neandertals must have also possessed the essential foundations for modern language. This paper analyzes the evidence for a revision of the antiquity of language and ultimately concurs that it is indeed convincing.