

## **Homo erectus and the semiotic progression**

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Abstract: This paper argues that language is primarily a tool for communication, not primarily a means of thought expression. It makes the case that language has its roots in (likely) intentional iconicity of Australopithecines and probably had reached the level of a G1 grammar (linear ordering of symbols + gestures & pitch modulation, or triality of patterning) more than one million years ago. Other forms of language, e.g. hierarchical, recursive grammars, are later embellishments that are functionally useful (Simon 1962) yet are neither necessary nor sufficient to have human language. This talk considers the evolution of culture among early hominins and how gap between indexes and icons to symbols might have been bridged. I argue that Homo erectus is the inventor of language via symbols and discuss how symbols could have led to what I refer to as triality of patterning, the hallmark of all human languages, found in no other species we are aware of currently. The central claim is that the “Semiotic Progression” (indexes → icons → symbols → triality) predicted implicitly by C.S. Peirce offers the best model the appearance of language in the genus Homo. The key feature of human language is its underdeterminancy - no one ever says all they mean nor means all they say.