# Creating Language: Integrating Evolution, Acquisition, and Processing (MIT Press)

*By Morten H. Christiansen, Nick Chater*



**Creating Language: Integrating Evolution, Acquisition, and Processing (MIT Press)** By Morten H. Christiansen, Nick Chater

Language is a hallmark of the human species; the flexibility and unbounded expressivity of our linguistic abilities is unique in the biological world. In this book, Morten Christiansen and Nick Chater argue that to understand this astonishing phenomenon, we must consider how language is created: moment by moment, in the generation and understanding of individual utterances; year by year, as new language learners acquire language skills; and generation by generation, as languages change, split, and fuse through the processes of cultural evolution. Christiansen and Chater propose a revolutionary new framework for understanding the evolution, acquisition, and processing of language, offering an integrated theory of how language creation is intertwined across these multiple timescales.

Christiansen and Chater argue that mainstream generative approaches to language do not provide compelling accounts of language evolution, acquisition, and processing. Their own account draws on important developments from across the language sciences, including statistical natural language processing, learnability theory, computational modeling, and psycholinguistic experiments with children and adults. Christiansen and Chater also consider some of the major implications of their theoretical approach for our understanding of how language works, offering alternative accounts of specific aspects of language, including the structure of the vocabulary, the importance of experience in language processing, and the nature of recursive linguistic structure.

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## Editorial Review

Review

Our understanding of language -- its evolution, acquisition, and processing -- is undergoing a seismic shift and this engaging, ambitious book clarifies and motivates the new exciting landscape.

(Adele E. Goldberg, Professor of Psychology, Princeton University)


This book is unique in its attempt to take a usage-based and unified approach to the sciences of language: its evolution, historical change, processing, and acquisition. It covers an extraordinarily wide range of relevant and up-to-date literature from which it builds an important theoretical approach. It provides the foundation for asking all the fundamental questions in language research.

(Elena Lieven, Professor, ESRC LuCiD Child Study Centre, University of Manchester; coauthor of *Child Language Acquisition: Contrasting Theoretical Approaches*)


Christiansen and Chater's *Creating Language* presents a compelling account of how acquisition and processing mutually constrain one another in shaping both linguistic performance and the nature of language. Then, to top it off, they fearlessly touch the linguistic third rail, language evolution, and the time scales shift from milliseconds and months, to millennia. The book will excite controversy, but it most certainly will excite.

(Gary S. Dell, Professor of Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

About the Author
Morten H. Christiansen is Professor of Psychology and Codirector of the Cognitive Science Program at Cornell University.

Nick Chater is Professor of Behavioural Science at Warwick Business School, University of Warwick.

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