



The Ascent of Babel: An Exploration of Language, Mind, and Understanding

Gerry T. M. Altmann

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Language is one of the faculties that sets humans apart from animals, the crucial thing which makes our complex social interactions possible. The Ascent of Babel explores the ways in which the mind produces and understands language: the ways in which the sounds of language evoke meaning, and the ways in which the desire to communicate causes us to produce those sounds to begin with. The 'ascent' symbolises different things: the progression from sound to meaning, the ascent that we each undergo, from birth onwards, as we learn our mother tongue, and the quest to understand the mental processes which underlie our use of language. Gerry Altmann leads the reader on this ascent - a fascinating tour which takes us from babies learning to say words to the production of spoken and written language, the effects of brain damage on language, and the ways in which computer simulations of interconnecting nerve cells can learn language.

The Ascent of Babel is a journey of discovery, written in an engaging and witty style, at the end of which it becomes clear that Babel's summit - the secret of language - may actually lie at its foundations, where babies play and language is learned.

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