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## Foreword by Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini

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## Preface

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## The Linguist Meets the Other

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### 1 The First Day: The Minimalist Viewpoint

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#### 1.1 The Mystery of Language Acquisition

2

(which takes some notice of facts that people actually know, but do not know they know)

2

even devoted caretakers are not geniuses—or linguists

2

*digression on the unbounded nature of linguistic structures*

3

**how does one know what is impossible?**

4

imagine a LAD (language acquisition device)

6

if Plato had only known about genes . . .

8

**a hopeless LAD**

9

#### 1.2 The Mystery of Language Variation

12

(wherein the role of the environment is first examined, and the reader is first treated to very complex systems)

12

genes and the environment

12

**linguistic variation has little to do with learning**

14

*digression about unification in the sciences*

16

*the emergence of order*

17

*phase transitions can be conservative or dissipative*

19

form in life and its relation to physical laws

22

#### 1.3 Knowledge of Language

25

(wherein the amazing fact is noted that children do not listen to their parents and the Linguist argues for the amusing claim that English doesn't exist)

25

**languages are very similar**

25

**independently of speakers, English is not even an abstraction**

27

*digression about rules*

31

could languages arise the same way species do?

32

**an I-language is characterized from a set of principles and parameters**

35

language change involves resetting parametric options

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