

Language, Mind, and Human Nature

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Hailed as one of the world's most influential people, experimental psychologist Steven Pinker's interests span all aspects of language, mind, and human nature. In his classic book *The Language Instinct*, Pinker argues that languages are learned but that language is an instinct — an evolutionary adaptation for the communication of complex ideas. Pinker has studied the meaning and acquisition of verbs, and what they tell us about concepts of causation, space, time, and intentions. He has also studied the forms of verbs, particularly the contrast between regular forms of the past tense, which are generated by the mental rule “add -ed” (talk, talked), and irregular forms (grow, grew), which have to be memorized. He also has studied the neural bases of language processing and the psychology of innuendo and euphemism, and in 2014 published a style manual applying psycholinguistics to writing.

In addition to language, Pinker has written on vast stretches of the human mind, including emotion, vision, reasoning, and especially violence. In *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Pinker presents data showing that we are living in the most peaceful time in human history, and seeks to explain why.