

## **DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

The question of language origins is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental and at the same time most difficult questions that has been pursued in the Western intellectual tradition. Articulated in the Antiquity, it continued to inspire religious and philosophical reflection, in some epochs, most notably the Enlightenment, becoming the central puzzle that guided the reflection on other fundamental problems such as the human nature. But in the second part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, research addressing the origins of language was largely relegated to the spheres of mythology or theology. The last decades, however, have seen extremely vibrant research in this area, with examples that can be presented as “success stories” of interdisciplinarity (e.g. research on the cultural evolution of novel communication systems), not unlike the success of neurosciences as an interdisciplinary enterprise. This vigorous development resulted in increasing recognition of language evolution as an independent scientific programme, endowed with the hallmarks of a proper science. But the budding meta-reflection of this sort has so far comprised fragmentary and intuitive attempts, and no systematic meta-study of this area of research exists. Here, we propose to carry out the first comprehensive meta-scientific description of what we call the Science of Language Evolution, in order to:

- evaluate the status of SLE as a science;
- establish its relation to mainstream linguistics.