Steven Pinker
The stuff of thought:
Language as a window into human nature
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Veiling intentions in innuendo / indirect speech

- If you could pass the guacamole that would be awesome.
- Would you like to come up & see my etchings?
- Nice store you got there...it would be shame if anything happened to it
- ...

...
Why bribes, requests, seductions, solicitations, threats are veiled when both sides know what those phrases mean?
Using language deliver/convey content + negotiate relationship type

• Could you pass..? - imperative without implied dominance
Individual vs. mutual knowledge

- **Individual:**
  - A knows x
  - B knows x

- **Mutual:**
  - A knows x
  - B knows x
  - A knows B knows x
  - B knows A knows B knows x ....
Why indirectness when everyone knows about speakers intent?

• Why feel more comfortable asking for etchings than for sex?

• When you say some innuendo you don't come to mutual knowledge...there is some uncertainty left (they knew it was about sex but they additionally think different thoughts)

• Saying smth directly – mutual knowledge => you can't take it back
References

• youtube.com, search for „RSA Language as a window into human nature“
• youtube.com/watch?v=3-son3EJTrU
• Steven Pinker, The stuff of thought (2007, Penguin Group)
Thank you for your attention...