More difficult than it sounds: prospects for progress in linguistics

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It is, or should be, a truism that the meaning of an utterance — its effect on the listener (and/or the speaker) — is fully contained neither in the sequence of words that comprise it, nor in its combination with a "grammar" that maps it to some other, perhaps hierarchical, structure. Moving on, we must recognize that language is, inherently: dialogic in its structure; social and discourse-oriented in its pragmatics; concurrent and multimodal in its substrate and execution; and dynamic and incremental in its communicative content. I shall attempt to bring these ideas to bear on the prospects for a computationally, psychologically, neurobiologically, and evolutionarily plausible account of language.