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TITLE: The evolution of communication when interests conflict

Economists and biologists have long been interested in how honest communication could be possible when there is a strong incentive for the speaker to lie. The traditional answer – pioneered by Michael Spence in economics and Amotz Zahavi in biology – is that there must be some significant cost to communication which renders lying unprofitable. This theory has focused on the question of what makes honesty stable, i.e. what prevents dishonest individuals from doing better and thus displacing honest ones? But, theorists in this tradition have not addressed how communication systems of this type might emerge in the first place, i.e. how could individuals who don't share a common language come to develop costs for lying in the first place? Recent work has suggested this is a serious oversight. While costs can make honesty resistant to invasion by dishonest individuals, it simultaneously makes it hard for any meaningful communication to emerge in the first place. This paper presents the mathematical models which underwrite this argument. In addition, it points to a number of alternative mechanisms that do not involve significant signal costs which might explain both how honest communication could be stable and how it could evolve.