

Week 7a Tuesday, May 12 Seminar Questions on Lieberman II

Focus on the questions Q1-Q5 in small groups. We will discuss questions Q6 and Q7 and any questions generated by the small groups in the full seminar.

Q1 Lieberman introduces the suggestive notion of a “syntax of innate behavior” (p. 81). The apparent strategy is to link the motor sequence in grooming to syntactic production in language. How does the subcortical basal ganglia fit into his strategy? (p. 87-89), in particular the Middle and Strick conclusion (p. 89)?

Q2. Discuss the various “natural experiments” in Chapter 4 that lead him to conclude (p.121) “that subcortical circuits are key elements of the human functional language system.” (p. 121). What examples did you find particularly interesting or compelling.

Q3 In chapter 5 Lieberman contrasts his biological or Darwinian approach to that of Chomsky and his associates. Given the reading and discussion from last week, does his characterization Chomsky still apply? If so, how.

Q4. What is Lieberman’s version of the evolution of human language. How does it relate to that of other authors we have considered.

Q5 In the final chapter, Lieberman cites at least two lessons for cognitive science from study of what he has called the “functional language system.” (p. 158-162). What are they?

Q6. After having read the whole text, characterize his functional language system approach to language.

Q7 Do you think that Lieberman’s claim to having outlined an approach to language and its evolution justifies his “final message” calling for a biological linguistics that is “real science.” (p. 167)

. Last small group task: the group as a whole should ultimately formulate a question for full seminar and write it on the board before the full group session.