

Language and the Evolution of Mind, Spring 2012

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Revised Description

What does our ability to speak and understand language reveal about the human mind? How much of our knowledge of language can be attributed to an innate language capacity and how much is dependent on individual experience? How are children able to develop a detailed and abstract understanding of their native language at a very young age? And how did human language evolve in the first place? In this program we will study theories of cognition, brain structure, and consciousness as they relate to the complex phenomena of language evolution, acquisition and use, as well as some of the ways in which possession of language might have contributed to the evolution of mind.

We will explore diverse kinds of evidence that shed light on the evolution of language, including recent work in evolutionary biology, animal behavior, neurobiology, cognitive neuroscience, and the evolutionary genetics of language. To understand the nature of linguistic processing we will look at the structure of language and ask what capacities must be present within human cognition in order for us to produce and understand human languages. We will study the ideas of Noam Chomsky and others who argue for a "universal grammar" as an explanation of rapid language acquisition and similarity among languages. We will also examine the parallels between human language and communication in other animals. Finally, we will reflect on the strategies adopted by scientists to reconstruct events in the deep past.

Program activities will include seminar, lectures and workshops. We will devote significant time to providing background material in linguistics, evolutionary biology, and cognitive neuroscience that pertains to the evolution of language. We will read scientific and philosophical material that addresses fundamental questions about consciousness, the relationship between mind and brain, and the relation between cognition and the human capacity for language. As part of this program, students should expect to participate actively in seminar and workshops, write several essays, and complete a final presentation. Students will be assigned to one of two Workshop Groups and one of three Seminars Groups.

Meeting Times

Tuesday, 9:30-12:30	Lecture/Workshop 9:30-12:30	Sem II B1107,
Tuesday, 1:30-4:00	Seminars	Sem II B2105, B2107, B2109
Wednesday, 9:30-1:00*	Lecture/Workshop	Sem II C1107

*Note different schedule for Weeks 1 and 3.

Friday 9:00-1:00	Lecture and seminar/writing workshop	Sem B1107*
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*Everyone will meet in Sem II B1107 at 9 am, followed by smaller meetings in B2105, B2107, B2109.

Required Reading:

Texts Read in Sections over the quarter for Seminars and Workshops

Christine Kenneally, *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language*, 2007

W. Tecumseh Fitch, *The Evolution of Language*, 2010

Texts Read for Successive Seminars

V.S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human*, 2011

Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origin of Music, Mind, and Body*, 2005

Derek Bickerton, *Adam's Tongue: How Humans Made Language, How Language Made Humans*, 2009

Additional Reading will be assigned from handouts (see moodle site) and internet resources.

Language and the Evolution of Mind Topic and Reading Schedule Revised 4-1-2012

Week / Theme	Tuesday	Wednesday	Friday
W1 Apr 3, 4, 6 Introduction to the study of language, mind, and evolution	9:30-12:30 Introduction to program, <i>Methodology in Historical Sciences</i> 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Descartes' account of mind (short handout to be given out in the morning session)	9:30-1:00 Lecture a: <i>Situating Chomsky</i> Lecture b: <i>History and methodology of contemporary Linguistics—an introduction to Linguistics</i> Background Reading: Chomsky selection passed out on Tuesday	9:00-11:45 B1107 Seminar: Review Chomsky reading from Wednesday; read Kenneally, pp. 1-39 and 85-174 12:00-1:00 <i>Theories of Brain and Mind in the 19th Century</i>
W2 Apr 10, 11, 13 Contemporary approaches to Mind and to Language	9:30-12:30 Lecture 2: <i>Introduction to studying the brain / Ramachandran on Studying Mind and Brain</i> Video: "Secrets of the Mind" 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Ramachandran, <i>The Tell Tale Brain</i> , Ch 1-4 (pp. 3-135)	9:30-1:00 Lecture/Workshop: <i>Linguistics and Language Acquisition Workshop</i> Reading: Fitch Ch 3 "Language"; Pinker handout on Moodle	9:00-11:45 B1107 Seminar: Ramachandran, <i>The Tell Tale Brain</i> , ch. 5-9 (pp. 136-293) 12:00-1:00 <i>Scientific Dialogues, Introduction to Final Group Project and Presentation</i>
W3 Apr 17, 18, 20 Evolution Theory and Language	9:30-12:30 Lecture 3: <i>Biological and Linguistic Evolution in the 19th Century</i> 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Fitch, ch 1 (all), ch 2 (pp. 35-46), ch 11 (all); Darwin, Selection from <i>Descent of Man</i> (Moodle); Van Wyhe, "Descent of Words"(pp. 94-100) (Moodle)	Workshop: <i>Primate classification and observation based on skeletal evidence</i> NOTE TWO MEETING TIMES 9-11 am Workshop Group 1 (WSG1) from all three seminars meets in Sem 2 C1107 11-1 am Workshop Group 2 (WSG2) from all three seminars meet in Sem 2 C1107 Reading: Fitch, ch 5, 6. Focus on Study Questions (Handout on Moodle)	9:00-1:00 B1107 <i>Essays on Ramachandran Due</i> 9:30-11:00 WSG1 by seminar in regular Seminar rooms; WSG2 students will complete dialogue in B1107. 11:00-12:30 WSG2 by seminar in regular Seminar rooms; WSG1 students will complete dialogue in B1107. 12:30-1:00 Everyone meets in B1107.
W4 Apr 24, 25, 27 Animal Communication	9:30-12:30 Lecture 4: <i>Animal Language/Animal Minds</i> . Video: <i>Can Chimps Talk</i> and <i>Ape Genius</i> 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Savage-Rumbaugh, Selection from "Apes, Language, and Human Mind (moodle); Kenneally, ch 2 (pp. 40-51), Fitch ch 4 (all)	9:30-1:00 Film/Discussion: "Project Nim" Reading: Handout on Moodle TBA	9:00-1:00 B 1107 Seminar: Kenneally, ch 11-14 (pp. 192-254); Fitch, ch 2 (pp. 46-72); Handout on Moodle TBA
W5 May 1, 2, 4 Language and the Brain	9:30-12:30 Lecture5: <i>Studying the brain</i> 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Lieberman (Moodle); Kenneally, ch. 4 (pp. 68-81), ch. 10 (pp. 175-191)	9:30-1:00 Workshop: <i>The Evolution of Speech</i> Reading: Fitch, ch 8-10 (pp. 297-385) "The Evolution of Speech"	9:00-1:00 B 1107 <i>Essays on Animal Communication / Controversies in Evolution Due</i> Same schedule as Friday, Week 3.

Week / Theme	Tuesday	Wednesday	Friday
W6 May 8, 9, 11 Human Evolution and Language	9:30-12:30 Lecture 6: <i>Human Evolution</i> Reading: Fitch, ch 7 (pp. 250-293) 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Mithen, <i>Singing Neanderthals</i> , ch 1-9 (pp. 1-138)	9:30-1:00 Lecture/ Workshop: <i>Varieties of Protolanguage</i> Reading: Fitch, ch 12-14 (pp. 401-507)	9am Sem II B 1107 Seminar: Mithen, <i>Singing Neanderthals</i> , ch 10-17 (pp. 139-277) Workshop on dialogues
W7 May 15, 16, 18 The Debate over the Evolution of Language	9:30-12:30 Lecture 7: The Debate over Evolution of Language 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Hauser, Chomsky, Fitch, “The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did it Evolve” (2002); Jackendoff and Pinker (2002) (both on Moodle)	9:30-1:00 Workshop: <i>Chomsky’s Minimalism and the Debate</i> Reading: Chomsky, “An Interview on Minimalism” (Moodle)	9:00-1:00 B 1107 Essays on Singing Neanderthals Due Same schedule as Friday, Week 3.
W8 May 22, 23, 25 The Debate Continues	9:30-12:30 Lecture 8: Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Debate 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Fitch, Hauser, Chomsky (2005); Pinker and Jackendoff (2005) (both on Moodle)	9:30-1:00 Final Presentation Organized and Developed	9:00-1:00 B 1107 Seminar: Bickerton, <i>Adam’s Tongue</i> ch. 1-6 (pp. 1-127)
W9 May 29, 30, June 1 Beyond the Debate	9:30-12:30 Lecture 9: Assessment of the Journey: Faculty Panel 1:30-4:00 Seminar: Bickerton, ch. 7-12 (pp. 128-250); Kenneally, ch. 15-16 and Epilogue (pp. 255-300); Fitch, ch13 (pp. 508-512)	9:30-1:00 Project preparation <i>Week 10 presentation schedule announced</i> Final Run Through of Presentation	9:00-1:00 B 1107 Essays on Adam’s Tongue Due Same schedule as Friday, Week 3.
W10 June 5, 6, 8 Project Presentations	9:30-12:30 TEAM PRESENTATIONS 1:30-4:00 TEAM PRESENTATIONS	9:30-1:00 TEAM PRESENTATIONS <i>Evaluation Conferences Scheduled</i>	9:00-1:00 TEAM RESENTATIONS Pot Luck
Week 11 June 12, 13, 14	EVALUATION CONFERENCES		