THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE HUMAN LANGUAGE FACULTY

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Withers Hall, Room 331
Map: http://www.ncsu.edu/campus_map/north.htm

All are welcome

Abstract: Contemporary linguistic theory takes the generative features of language use as a central focus of study. Noam Chomsky and others have maintained that explaining these generative features requires an appeal to a human language faculty or a biologically-guided, human-specific, cognitive capacity for the acquisition and use of language. In this talk, I explore questions about the evolutionary origins of the human language faculty. I argue, contra Chomsky, that the evolution of the human language faculty depends upon social facts—in particular, that there are a variety of social preconditions for the biological emergence of the human capacity for language. After situating my proposal with respect to the so-called extended evolutionary synthesis, I develop some of its theoretical advantages. Specifically, I argue that this social conception of the evolution of the human language faculty does a better job explaining the generative features of language use than Chomsky’s own favored proposal.

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