Evolutionary Linguistics

This module investigates the origins and evolution of Language. Since the kinds of questions that need to be asked are also informed by work in numerous other disciplines, including biology, ethology, neurology, paleontology, anthropology and cognitive science, it is legitimate to look at language origins from all these perspectives, as well as reading the work of linguists. The set text is:


In addition, there are a number of very readable popular science introductions roughly in this area. All participants should try to read at least one of these: Calvin & Bickerton (2000), Burling (2005), Mithen (2005), Pinker (1994), Dunbar (1996), and the somewhat more technical Deacon (1997), and to a lesser extent, Carstairs-McCarthy (1999). There are other introductory treatments, but these are the ones I think most worthwhile, though clearly none is completely (or even remotely) correct!

There are three (closely related) papers which all participants should read: the seminal work, Pinker & Bloom (1990), which was an important starting point for many recent studies; two recent papers, Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch (2002) and Pinker & Jackendoff (2005). There is also a response to the latter paper, namely Fitch, Hauser & Chomsky (2005).

Four recent collections of papers also give a good idea of current work:

Seminars: If there is enough interest, I am happy to meet and guide discussion in seminars to talk over readings.

Evaluation: Summative assessment takes the form of a written paper (maximum 5,000 words) which is due in by 14 May 2006. A proposed topic plus a short outline plan, and including a reading list, must be submitted in typescript (not via e-mail) by March 31 (maximum two sides of A4). Full drafts will not be read, but I advise submitting a section for me to comment on (up to 5 sides). A section submitted by 20 April will be returned, with comments, by 3 May. Earlier submission is strongly advised.
The topics and readings:
The topics we will examine in this course are divided into three broad areas, although there are many intersecting issues between these areas. These topics have been chosen according to the following criteria: things that I think it’s most important for you to know about; things that I think will be most interesting and accessible; things that are most relevant to linguistics; things that reflect my own work and interests in the field.

1. Human evolution and phylogeny
2. Prerequisites for language and issues of continuity
3. Protolanguage and the evolution of syntax

The field of language evolution is extremely large, and is also subject to the whims of fashion, so any list of suggested readings is necessarily not comprehensive, and will be out of date as soon as it is written. In general, more recent publications will be more useful than older ones. You are not expected to read everything, but you are expected to keep reading something! You should aim to read two–three short readings each week (e.g. chapters from a textbook, or from a popular science introduction), or two more demanding papers or chapters from the primary literature, or (some of) one really difficult major paper (e.g. Pinker & Bloom).

General introductory readings on language evolution from linguistic perspectives. Everyone needs to read these as soon as possible in the course:

- Bickerton (2005)
- The first five chapters in C&K textbook (Christiansen & Kirby; Pinker; Hurford; Newmeyer; Bickerton)

1. Human evolution and phylogeny. Relevant stages in the evolution of Homo sapiens. What would constitute evidence for the appearance of linguistic abilities?
   - What do we know about when and where? (references under Related readings below)
   - What can we tell about who had linguistic abilities? (Hurford 1999)
   - genetic evidence (Cavalli-Sforza 2000; Pinker 2001)
   - brain size (Gibson 1996)
   - lack of physical evidence for language
   - relevance of archaeological record (C&K ch. 8: Davidson; Noble & Davidson 1996; Davidson & Noble 1993, Reynolds 1993, and many other papers in Gibson & Ingold)


2. Prerequisites for language and issues of continuity
   - symbols (Bickerton 2005; C&K ch 7: Deacon; Deacon 1997; C&K ch 6: Tomasello; C&K ch3: Hurford)
• the vocal tract, speech, and the development of phonological categories \((C&K\ ch\ 13: Studdert-Kennedy\ &\ Goldstein;\ C&K\ ch\ 13:\ Lieberman;\ Studdert-Kennedy\ 2005;\ Oudeyer\ 2005;\ De\ Boer\ 2001)\)
• brain structure \((C&K\ ch\ 7:\ Deacon;\ Lieberman\ 2000;\ 2003;\ Papers\ in\ Crow\ (ed.)\ 2002\ Part\ II,\ Language\ and\ the\ evolution\ of\ the\ brain;\ Calvin\ &\ Bickerton\ 2000)\)
• mirror neurons \((C&K\ ch.\ 10:\ Arbib;\ Arbib\ 2005a,\ 2005b;\ Hurford\ 2004;\ Arbib\ 2004)\)
• Could language have evolved from the call systems of primates? \((Ploog\ 2002;\ Tallerman\ 2006b)\)
• Are there relevant abilities in other species? \((Papers\ in\ King\ 1999;\ Papers\ in\ Oller\ &\ Griebel\ 2004;\ Papers\ in\ Gibson\ &\ Ingold\ 1993;\ Savage-Rumbaugh\ et\ al.\ 1998;\ Marler\ 1998;\ Aitchison\ 1998;\ Tomasello\ 2002;\ Fouts\ &\ Waters\ 2001)\)
• What features are unique to Lg.? \((C&K\ ch9:\ Hauser\ &\ Fitch;\ Pinker\ &\ Jackendoff\ 2005)\)
• the recursion debate \((Hauser,\ Chomsky\ &\ Fitch;\ Pinker\ &\ Jackendoff\ 2005;\ Fitch,\ Hauser\ &\ Chomsky\ 2005)\)


• Bickerton: early hypotheses, later developments. The evolution of protolanguage and of full language. \((Bickerton\ 1998;\ Bickerton\ 1990;\ Bickerton\ 1995;\ Bickerton\ 2000;\ Calvin\ &\ Bickerton\ 2000)\)
• Carstairs-McCarthy: syllabic origins for clause structure. \((Carstairs-McCarthy\ 1999,\ esp.\ chs.\ 4,\ 5,\ 6\ (and\ avoiding\ 3);\ Carstairs-McCarthy\ 1998,\ 2000;\ Tallerman\ 2005,\ 2006a)\)
• Holistic vs. synthetic protolanguage \((Wray\ 1998,\ 2000,\ 2002;\ Tallerman\ 2006b)\)
• Jackendoff: The incremental model. \((Jackendoff\ 2002,\ ch.\ 8)\)
• Development of grammatical categories \((Heine\ &\ Kuteva\ 2002)\)
• Development of morphology \((Carstairs-McCarthy\ 2005)\)


References
The references provided only scratch the surface of an enormous literature. In addition to the list here, you will find many useful references in most of these books and papers. There are also numerous papers in journals such as Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Language and Communication, and Paleobiology, all of which the library subscribes to.


Tallerman, Maggie. 2006a. Challenging the syllabic model of ‘syntax-as-it-is’. In Patrick


