

Language and Evolution

Purpose: The purpose of the seminar is to explore how our understanding of language influences, and is influenced by, recent developments in studies of human evolution, anthropology and prehistory.

Course #	19SLE
Format:	Seminar
Moderator:	Kathy Campbell
Date and Time:	Thursday, 9:30-11:30 10 weeks, starting February 28
Location:	UMass University Without Walls, Hadley

Description: We will consider several ways in which the topics of language and evolution intersect, starting with the co-evolution of the human genome, anatomy and consciousness with the emergence of language. Thinking in this area has been revolutionized in the last 10-15 years, with the date for the likely emergence of language being pushed back several hundred thousand years. The general principles of historical and comparative linguistics, describing the evolution of languages, were developed in the 19th century, but this too remains an active area of research, influenced (for example) by new discoveries about the prehistoric migration of peoples. Finally, is something like a "universal grammar" required to explain how virtually all humans are able to acquire language, or are the principles that guide biological and other evolutionary processes sufficient?

Role of participants: Each participant will research a topic from a list provided by the moderator, or a relevant topic of their own choosing, and make a presentation to the other seminar participants.

Resources: TBA

About the Moderators: Kathy has been a member of LIR for 6 years and has moderated two previous seminars. In her twenties she considered becoming a professional linguist, but thought better of it.

Maximum number of participants: 18

Auditors accepted: yes, up to 2