

Lunchtime panel: “Language: A case study in Optimality?”

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There is a growing movement among those who are concerned with the psychological and biological mechanisms underlying language to consider the possibility that the component of the mind that is devoted to linguistic competence - call it the faculty of language - might be an optimal system. The panel will consider possible construals of the term ‘optimal’ as applied to language, asking in what sense - if any - the faculty of language constitutes an instance of a perfect biological system. Regarding language as a possible case study in optimality therefore has implications for the spectrum of issues that come under the banner of the conference theme; hence the discussion will inform, and be informed by, the broader dialogue as it unfolds throughout the day.

Suggested background readings

Boeckx, C. & M. Piattelli-Palmarini. "Language as a natural object; Linguistics as a Natural Science". In press in *The Linguistic Review*.

Chomsky, N. with Adriana Belletti and Luigi Rizzi. "An Interview on Minimalism" In Chomsky, N. & A. Belletti and L. Rizzi (eds.) *On Nature and Language* (2002) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fukui, N. 1996. “On the Nature of Economy in Language”. *Cognitive Studies* 3, 51-71.

The following readings, which are recommended as background papers for other presentations, are also relevant for the panel:

Freidin, R. & J-R Vergnaud. 2001. "Exquisite connections: some remarks on the evolution of linguistic theory". *Lingua* 111 639-666 (*background reading for Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini's talk*)

Hauser, M., N. Chomsky, and W.T. Fitch. 2002. The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve? *Science* 298, 1569-1579. (*background reading for Dennis Ott's presentation*)

Marcus, G. 2006. “Cognitive architecture and descent with modification”. *Cognition* 101, 443-465. (*background reading for Gary Marcus's talk*)