



Visiting Researcher Seminar
12noon Monday 22nd May 2017
Psychology Common Room (3A94)



Language adapts to interaction

Dr Sean Roberts
University of Bristol

Language appears to be adapted to constraints from many domains such as production, transmission, memory, processing and acquisition. These adaptations and constraints have formed the basis for theories of language evolution, but arguably the primary ecology of language is face-to-face conversation. Taking turns at talk, repairing problems in communication and organising conversation into contingent sequences seem completely natural to us, but are in fact highly organised, tightly integrated systems which are not shared by any other species.

In this talk I discuss how one might link features of real time interaction to different levels of language evolution: the evolution of a capacity for language; the initial emergence of linguistic systems; and the ongoing cultural evolution of languages. I illustrate the links in each level my own work using computational models, lab experiments and corpus analyses. I argue that a full explanation of the origin and structures of languages needs to take into account the ecology in which language is used: face to face interactive communication.