**Vocal skills, sign language and language change WEEK 3, Sedivy II, part 2.4-2.7**

**The Evolution of Speech**

**What’s implied by the suggestion of independent evolution of vocal skills in diverse animals, incl. humans vs. other primates?**

**Sound-making apparatus**

**Who depends on auditory learning? Learning and knowing vs. imitating and using sounds**

**Cognitive and affective sound-making**

**Babbling**

**Vocal learners of language**

### What’s unexpected about the sound making apparatus and sound learning of humans and birds, and humans and chimps? How far can chimps go in mimicking vocalizations? What is songbirds’ range of vocalizations and mimicking capacity?

How would you describe human vocalizations vs. those of chimps?

Why and how do babies babble?

In relation to speech, what’s the one feature of human language design that Hockett got wrong?

**How Humans Invent Languages: Sign, homesign and gesture**

**Cultural transmission and communal learning**

**Inventing language**

**Language code**

**Holistic signs**

**Instinctive gesturing vs. communicating**

**Learning vs. hearing**

**Language universals constrained by cognition**

Sensitive period of language learning: Children cf. Adult learners

          Nicaraguan school for the deaf: Inventing sign language

          From homesign to conventional conceptualized signing: "linguistic code"

**Social learning**

**What did children in the Nicaraguan school for the deaf invent? Why were they sent there, in the first place?**

**Was the children’s age difference significant for the speed and manner of language acquisition?**

**On what sort of code did they settle?** In what ways did language code become further conventionalized they had an opportunity to socialize with peers who were deaf as well? What could explain the conventionalization?

To what characteristics of the deaf community should we pay attention when comparing **the Nicaraguan school and Israel Bedouin** community? In what specific ways were the „communicative pressures“ there different?

In what ways are homesigns different from conceptualized signing through a linguistic code?

What suggests that gestures could have been the precursor of conceptualized signs?

How good in signing can chimps (vs. monkeys) become? What does the difference between them imply about our evolution?

At what evolutionary stage did the „cognitive pathway“ of vocalizations come in place?

What is the role of cultural transmission of language?

What is the other way of learning and is it proven? See the web activities:

Children using homesing

# Gestures supporting or replacing speech

**Inventing a sign language**

**Survival of the fittest language? Language change and adaptation**

**What sort of languages does survive?**

**Genetic relationship of languages**

**The role of new language learners**

**Cultural transmission and filtering language input**

         Inconsistently produced innovations and the role of children learners as filters

         Factors of cultural transmission - what characteristics a language needs to have to ensure its survival?

         J. McWhorter's theory of why English dropped its endings (paradigm simplification)

**PROJECT on variation and change in English, p. 53**

**What are the constraints of language change?**

What makes a language fit to survive? what characteristics does a language need to have to ensure its survival?

From the biological perspective, what is characteristic of an adaptive trait? Does language adapt to brain/mind or v.v.?

What is „communicatively useful“ and efficient? What are „the best communicative solutions“?

What is the role of cultural transmission in language change?

What role did Vikings‘ invasions and settlement in Britain (9-10th AD) play in cultural transmission and shaping of English?

What is meant by children learners‘ filtering adults‘ language usage?... i.e., weeding out inconsistently produced innovations and holding on to those meant to survive?

What’s your opinion of J. McWhorter's theory of why English dropped its endings and paradigm simplifications? Why did such a radical restructuring of Old English grammar happen?

episode 1, Birth of a new language (investigating the new sign language in Managua, Nicaragua) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maUN3asrHAo>