

Human self-domestication and the evolution of modern languages

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In my talk, I will re-examine the problem of the evolution of language (and the emergence of present-day languages) from the point of view of the self-domestication hypothesis of human evolution. In brief, this hypothesis argues that our species has gone through an evolutionary process that parallels the changes experienced by domesticated mammals. I will support the view that this process can account for many of the cognitive and behavioural changes observed in our species with an impact on our linguistic abilities. Specifically, I will try to show that they can explain many of the features of the cultural niche that enables the sophistication of languages via a cultural mechanism, thus helping reconcile biological and cultural accounts of language evolution. I will provide an ample range of evidence (from paleogenetic to clinical) supporting this view. I will conclude with some potential ways of testing this hypothesis and with some avenues for future research.