



Filosofia das Ciências da Vida

2009: World Year of Biology

18H00 FCUL EDIFÍCIO C8 SALA 8.2.06 ENTRADA LIVRE

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27 Março'09 Doutora Nathalie Gontier

Evolutionary Epistemology exemplified by the evolutionary origin of language



: ESTA CONFERÊNCIA SERÁ PROFERIDA EM INGLÊS :

Evolutionary linguistics is currently a fast rising discipline. One of its basic tenets is that the emergence of language needs to be understood as an evolutionary process, and therefore, that it needs to be studied by evolutionary theories such as natural selection, systems theory, etc. These evolutionary mechanisms are consequently applied to a variety of different phenomena, including amongst others, mirror neurons, (elements of) the supralaryngeal vocal tract, pointing, grammar, presumed language genes such as the *FOXP2* gene, Pidgins and Creoles, etc.

The study of these different phenomena pose interesting epistemological problems. Namely, are these different phenomena units or levels of language evolution? And which evolutionary mechanisms are best suited to explain the evolution of these language-related phenomena?

Traditionally, the units and levels of selection debate has revolved around the concepts of replicators and interactors and how these units are selected at the level of an environment. However, many of the items under investigation within evolutionary linguistics do not lend themselves to an easy classification of the sort "x is a replicator" or "x is an interactor". The fact that such a classification is difficult in turn disables a clear identification of what the elements are that actually evolve within language evolution.

To overcome this barrier, a methodology is introduced that is informed by evolutionary epistemology, and that allows one to clearly distinguish between the different units, levels and evolutionary mechanisms that are involved in language evolution.

Nathalie Gontier holds a PhD in Philosophy of science (evolutionary biology), awarded by the Free University of Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Belgium; and a licentiate in Comparative science of culture, awarded by the University of Ghent. She has been a research assistant of the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders, Belgium (2001-2008); a pré-doctoral research fellow of the Konrad Lorenz Institute, Altenberg, Austria (2008); and is currently a member of the Centre for Philosophy of Science, of the Universidade de Lisboa. She hold a post-doctoral research grant of the FCT. Her main research areas are evolutionary epistemology, the philosophy of evolutionary biology (sympio genesis and punctuated equilibrium), and the origin of language and behavioural modernity.

Próxima conferência:

**2 ABRIL'09 DOUTOR ANDRÉ LEVY | BIOLOGIA EVOLUTIVA: O CONTÍNUO ENTRE
CIÊNCIAS E OS LIMITES DA CIÊNCIA**