

“The human self-domestication hypothesis as a way of reconciling the biological and cultural narratives of language evolution”

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Abstract

Our ability to learn and use languages (commonly referred to as our faculty of language) is usually thought to have resulted from biological processes mostly. By contrast, language diversity is thought to depend on factors internal to languages. Increasing evidence suggests instead that both elements are engaged in a complex feedback loop, with our cognition accounting for key aspects of languages, but with languages affecting our cognition, and that core languages' features also depend on external factors, particularly, the physical and the cultural environments in which humans live. In this talk, I will argue that the hypothesis of human self-domestication (that is, the claim that humans exhibit features also found in domesticated animals) can help reconcile these two narratives. Accordingly, self-domestication might have contributed to both the sort of brain/cognitive changes resulting in our language faculty and to the emergence of the cultural niche that enabled languages to gain complexity via a cultural process.