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Stream B: Cultural Change and Evolutionary Theory

Title: Applied cultural evolution: Studying language change with evolutionary methods

Abstract: Language change is a paradigmatic example of cultural evolution. It is one of the most tractable domains for applied work, with mechanisms of transmission, patterns of variation, and dynamics of evolution all studied directly or via historical evidence. Recent work in historical linguistics exploits large data sets and employs methods borrowed from evolutionary biology to assess claims about the rates and mechanisms of change of various features of language. In this paper I assess some of these studies and compare the methodological approach of linguists with the theoretical claims of philosophers.

Bio: A PhD candidate in philosophy of biology seeking to understand the application of mathematical results to evolutionary theory, especially pertaining to communication and information processing. I obtained an MSci from the University of Bristol (UK) in 2010 and worked as a software developer for several years before starting my PhD.