

Tool intelligence as an explanation of cross-linguistic variation and family resemblance

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This talk taps primatological and linguistic field research to draw an analogy between prelinguistic material cultures of nonhuman primates and natural human languages. Tools are invented by nonhuman primates under natural conditions of living and are subject to group-specific lines of cultural descent. The psychological infrastructure of this behavior consists of general cognitive abilities and the ability to invent problem solutions intentionally. Language rests on the same psychological infrastructure. It is a tool for communication. Unlike material tool use, it is aimed at the complex mental world of social others. Linguistics and cognitive science are thus given new incentives to search for cognitive homology in areas of extended problem awareness and manipulative intentionality.