

The Meaning of *Evolutionary Linguistics*

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The term *evolutionary linguistics* has been in currency since about 2005, in reference to several phenomena: 1) the phylogenetic emergence of language, 2) structural and functional changes that languages have undergone in human history, and 3) language birth and death. Inspired by evolutionary biology, it reflects a uniformitarian approach to language evolution that embeds languages in human mental and social activities. It also underscores the significance of the actuation question, which has prompted me to characterize my personal approach as ecological.

In this lecture, I will articulate the meaning of the “ecology of language.” I will explain the respects in which its characterization relative to language phylogeny differs from its application to language history. I will also show why the Darwinian account of evolution by competition and selection can apply so adequately even to languages and other domains of culture, constrained as it should be by the ontogenetic properties of the latter. Examples to support my position will be drawn from colonization and globalization as they instantiate especially population movements, population structure, and language contact, as well as derivative evolutionary phenomena, such as language speciation and language endangerment and loss.