Postgraduate Seminars
Seminar Series 2019 - 2020

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&
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“Linguistics, Biologically: Knowledge of Language and the Language Faculty”

Wednesday, 18 March 2020, at 17:00
Building CTF (ΧΩΔ) 01, Room 110, Panepistimioupoli Campus

This seminar is open to the public

In a nutshell, biolinguistics is concerned with exploring the “biological foundations of language” (to piggy-back on the eponymous book title of Lenneberg 1967). This may mean different things to different linguists, and even to different scientists from other disciplines. The goal of this talk is to bring the biolinguistic program closer by looking at the ontological foundations of biolinguistics and opening up said nutshell a little. The centerpiece of the presentation will be a comprehensive discussion of Chomsky’s (1986) ‘five big questions’, thereby putting the notion of ‘knowledge of language’ in its historico-philosophical and modern scientific perspective. Thus equipped with the reasoning behind the ‘generative enterprise’, the relationship between Chomsky’s ‘five big questions’ and Tinbergen’s (1963) characterization of the aims and methods of ethology will be discussed. The final part of the talk surveys six decades of research into the faculty of language and brings some pertinent questions concerning the nature of Universal Grammar to the forefront, including recent and ongoing developments in the cognitive neurobiology of language, which ultimately lead to present-day research concerns and challenges for the near future.