The role of the human political singularity in the emergence of language
Why did language emerge in the first place?
Evolution of language

- **Idea #1:** useful for the group or the species
  - Basic argument refuted in 1966 (Williams)
  - No stable model
    less unstable one: (Choi & Bowles, 2007).

- **Idea #2:** reciprocal cooperation
  - No stable model with plausible hypotheses (Dessalles, 1999)
  - Wrong predictions about language use

- **Idea #3:** social signalling
  - Stable, robust models

References:
- Knight et al., 2000
- Gintis, Smith & Bowles, 2001
- Dessalles 2010, 2014
« How did we get from an ordinary primate that could not talk to the strange human primate that can’t shut up? »

(Burling 2005, p. 4)
<table>
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<th><strong>Chimps</strong></th>
<th><strong>Human beings</strong></th>
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<td><em>(Pan troglodytes)</em></td>
<td><em>(Homo sapiens)</em></td>
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Human beings versus Chimps (Pan troglodytes):

- **Hierarchy**
  - Status
  - Or “equality” (Boehm, 2000)
- **Politics**
  - Alliances, friendship
- **Social agonistic behaviour**
  - Displays, threats, bullying
  - Risky battles
- **Social attraction**
  - Grooming, . . .
Human language behaviour

- 16000 words spoken daily, 6 hours/day, 30% of awake time

- Two main forms
  - Communication about events (event signalling, narratives) ~30%
    - example
  - Discussion (logical consistency maintenance) ~60%
    - example
Signalling events


Human beings systematically communicate about anomalous (most often futile) events.
Question

Why are we systematically communicating about anomalous (inconsequential) events?

Is this linked to the fact that risk-free killing exists in our species?
The human political singularity

- It takes 50 minutes for five chimpanzees to kill a member of their community (Reynolds 2005)

- It takes one second for any human to kill another (Woodburn 1982; Boehm 2000:176; Bingham 2001)

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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Reproductive success</th>
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<tr>
<td>α-male</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>β-male</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>γ-male</td>
<td>7%</td>
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The human political singularity

- No overall increase of violence
- Individuals get acquainted with
  - informed individuals
  - faithful individuals

(Boehm, 2000)
Language evolved as a **social** signal

- In a risk-free killing context
  - You need informed (and reliable) friends
  - To attract friends:
    You signal any anomalous situation as a way to advertise your ability to anticipate killing risk
  - Modelling shows that costly social signals may emerge and remain stable in this context

Chimps seek for strength and protection therefore chimps display their strength and their faithfulness

Hominins seek for informed friends therefore hominins, when "chatting", display their ability to anticipate danger