



The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language presents:



Kenny Smith (University of Edinburgh)

The acquisition and evolution of linguistic variation.

**Wednesday, February 1, 12:00-1:30pm
Neubauer Collegium, 5701 S Woodlawn Ave., 1st floor**

To RSVP, click here: <https://cgsl.wufoo.com/forms/rsvp-for-cgsl-winter-workshop/>

Languages are shaped by their learning and use. Linguistic variation has recently become a test-case for exploring how biases inherent in these processes of learning and use impact on the structure of language. While language exhibits variation on all levels, that variation is not unconstrained: usage of alternate forms is conditioned in accordance with phonological, semantic, pragmatic or sociolinguistic criteria. I will review experimental paradigms in which participants learn artificial languages exhibiting variation, use those languages to communicate with other participants (interacting in pairs or small social groups in the lab), and produce linguistic data for other individuals to learn from (using iterated learning, where the language produced by one participant becomes the target for learning in another participant). This work shows how learning, use, and transmission serve to preserve, condition, or eliminate variation in artificial linguistic systems. More generally, this work speaks to constraints on variation within and across natural languages, and the mechanisms which shape the structure of human language. I'll finish up with some data from an iterated silent gesture paradigm, showing similar processes operating in the gestural modality - this will include some recent data suggesting that transmission between individuals and repetition within a single individual can produce similar effects, and I'd be interested in people's interpretation of that finding.

Free and open to the public. Lunch will be provided. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Laura Tharsen at ltharsen@uchicago.edu.

Organized by [The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language](#)
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