

Invitation to the Jenny Cheshire Lectures in Sociolinguistics

The sociolinguistics of non-equicomplexity

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Friday 8th June 2012 at 6:30pm

ArtsTwo Lecture Theatre, ArtsTwo Building, Mile End Campus

The notion that all languages have an equivalent degree of complexity was at one time very much part of the conventional wisdom of the linguistics community. And that view was, understandably, particularly strongly maintained in the face of a non-specialist public who still held to the view that some languages really were more “primitive” than others. Hockett wrote that “the total grammatical complexity of any language, counting both morphology and syntax, is about the same as any other”. The idea was that simplification at the level of morphology would be compensated for by complexification at the level of syntax, and vice versa. However, this invariance of linguistic complexity hypothesis has always been implicitly rejected by certain sorts of linguists, notably those sociolinguists, creolists and dialectologists who had learnt that language contact of certain sorts leads to simplification. It has always been obvious to them that, if the same language could be more or less simple at different points in time, then different languages could be more or less simple at the same point in time. This paper will address the topic of what exactly the social determinants of linguistic simplicity and complexity might be.

A reception will follow the lecture

Wine Reception sponsored by Oxford University Press and Blackwell-Wiley

Future dates of the Jenny Cheshire Lectures in Sociolinguistics

- The 2013 lecture will be given by Professor Jennifer Coates.
- The 2014 lecture will be given by Professor David Britain.
- The 2015 lecture will be given by Professor Paul Kerswill.

Ticket Information

This event is free to attend, but you must book tickets online in advance if you wish to attend. Please click the button on the right and follow the instructions to make a booking. You will then be emailed an e-ticket and you should bring this with you on the day.

Click here to
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Map and Directions

This event takes place at our Mile End Campus. Please click on the icon below for the map and directions:



Mile End Campus



The nearest tube stations are Stepney Green and Mile End

ArtsTwo Lecture Theatre
ArtsTwo Building
Queen Mary, University of London
Mile End Road
London E1 4NS

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this event please contact the Events Office via events@qmul.ac.uk or telephone 020 7882 5147.