

I can say without reservation or qualification that the Speaking Our Minds (SOM) book club was the single most challenging and rewarding intellectual experience of my career to date. Every day for two weeks some very bright and engaged people posted extensive comments on my work, and initiated many excellent conversations. It is a privilege to have one's work be the focus of so much attention and good quality debate, and I would like to express my gratitude to cognitionandculture.net for the opportunity.

So many good points were made that I almost want to rewrite the book! That's an exaggeration, of course, but an online book club really is the ideal way to find out how your readers actually read your work - much better than a published review - and these insights have at the very least provided me with plenty of material for a second edition. I don't think I would change any of the main claims, or the overall structure of the book, but if I were to edit it now, I would elaborate on and clarify many things. I won't here repeat matters of clarification, but this does seem a good opportunity to summarise, in no particular order, some of the most important ways in which I would add to the substance of SOM in light of the book club.

Clarify that SOM does not claim to solve everything. More than one participant understood SOM as making the claim that all the interesting questions one might wish to ask about language evolution are settled and resolved. It was not my intention to suggest this. I do think SOM does provide the right basic framework within which to frame other issues, but that is not to deny that there are many interesting and important questions that remain unanswered. I regret that this distinction is not explicit.

Show more clearly how pragmatics is neglected in language evolution. I said in the précis that pragmatics is neglected in language evolution, and that one way to read SOM is "as a demonstration of just how much we can learn about language evolution by taking pragmatics seriously". Two commentators, [Bart](#) and [Liz](#), disputed this, arguing that the importance of pragmatics is already widely appreciated. I don't agree. It is true that the importance of pragmatics is often acknowledged - but this is, in my view, mostly lip service. I would work to make this point more graphic in any future edition (unless matters change in the meantime, of course).

Precision on the distinction between code and ostension. The distinction between code model communication and ostensive-inferential communication is central to the thesis of SOM. [Liz](#) posed a number of challenges for it, and [Greg's comments](#) triggered an extended and informative discussion on the details of what this difference actually boils down to. It would be a good addition to SOM to describe the difference even more precisely and more specifically than is currently the case.

Further discussion of the communication of non-human primates, and defence of the claim that it is most likely not ostensive. SOM argues that ostensive communication is likely to be uniquely human. [Katja](#) and [Richard](#)'s comments posed a number of questions for this view. As I explained in my responses, I do not think that any of their points or arguments undermine my claims, but I do now see that there are several aspects to the argument that could have been elaborated on, or defended in more depth.

Further discussion of social cognition and communication. In the Preface to SOM I explicitly said that I would not much discuss alternative views, in order to retain a focus on the positive case for my own arguments (SOM, p.xiv). It is not always easy to get right the balance between criticism and advocacy, and if SOM erred too much on one side or the other, it was on the side of advocacy. This is probably most clearly the case in my discussion of the social cognition involved in ostensive communication, where there is a range of alternative views that I did not much discuss. [Tad made arguments in favour of one view in his comments](#), and [Richard touched on this theme too](#). There is certainly scope for discussion of other views here, and further elaboration and defence of my own.

One specific topic I did not discuss at all was the modularity of social cognition, and this in particular would make a good addition.

Some elaboration on cultural attraction. I think that cultural attraction is a critically important idea for cognition and culture studies. Looking back, I don't think SOM explains in enough detail just why it's so important, and what it has to offer language evolution. [Alberto's comments](#) forced me to do this, and it would have been good to say more about this in the book itself.

Further discussion of Chomsky, Universal Grammar, and associated issues? The issues around nativism, Universal Grammar, and generativism are so vexed that, to be frank, I was not and am still not even sure how to present them in a way that neither side would object to. Passions run high here, and different views about the value of an evolutionary perspective only add more fuel. The incendiary nature of these debates, and the associated risk of misunderstanding, is one (non-scientific) reason why SOM was officially neutral on these matters. Another reason is that I actually suspect that, if and when empirical data resolves these debates, all sides will claim that this is what they were saying all along – but to flesh this intuition out would have required a lot (a lot) more work. Still, in different ways both [Deirdre](#) and [Tim](#) prodded at these issues, and thanks to those conversations I can see some ways in which I could have said more, without unnecessarily opening a large can of worms.

The book club conversations also suggested several ideas for future research projects. I'd like to highlight three in particular. In each case, the idea for the project comes not from me, but from the comments of one or more of the book club participants. For these ideas I am very grateful, and I would be delighted to see any of them taken forward (whether by me or by others).

Elaboration of how the first ostensive signals could have emerged. Mathieu posed [some excellent questions](#) about how exactly an ostensive communication system can get started, and made some suggestions about how to begin to answer these questions. As I suggested in my reply, elaboration on these points could make for a substantial contribution to the literature.

Elaboration of how reputational effects can come to stabilise a communication system. In SOM I argued that reputation keeps human communication stable, but, as [Olivier pointed out in his comments](#), I did not offer any explanation of how such a state of affairs could emerge in the first place. Olivier is right that there are some important coevolutionary questions here. [Clark hinted at a similar point](#). As I said in my response to Olivier, this issue is ripe for a modelling project.

Progress on fundamental conceptual issues? [Dan suggested in his comments](#) that the framework I use for defining communication is a promising one for addressing some deep and long-standing conceptual issues about the nature of communication. Relatedly, [Ira & Tiffany](#) see potential in my framework for alignment between evolutionary biology and pragmatics about how to think about communication. The pursuit of these possibilities would be a project of substantial philosophical import, of relevance to the foundations of several disciplines.

These two lists together illustrate how the book club touched on all the main themes of SOM, and just what a rich and productive intellectual experience it was. I hope that the other participants felt similarly. It was challenging in just the right way, and provided many ideas worth following up. So let me finish by reiterating my thanks to all at ICCI who helped to make this happen, and also to all the other participants. It was a privilege to have one's work subject to so much quality discussion.