**The role of vertical social contact in language emergence: Evidence from Nicaraguan Sign Language.**Ann Senghas, Barnard College

The transmission of a language across multiple generations is necessary for a language’s survival. Once new elements enter a language, they can persist in subsequent generations of users, provided they are faithfully learned. But does this iterated process of language learning generate language structure? What is the nature of the changes that happen as a language is passed from one generation to the next (as opposed to spreading horizontally)? Here we consider the case of Nicaraguan Sign Language (NSL), a young, urban sign language that emerged from within a community of children brought together in an educational setting in the 1970s. Since NSL arose over the past four decades, members of different age cohorts today represent a living record of the changes that took place with each new generation of learning. As language develops and converges, social factors that promote growth and change are at tension with factors that promote stability and parity across the community. Accordingly, some aspects of the language are be slow to emerge, or subject to rapid reanalysis, while others establish themselves early and remain consistent over generations. Examples from the emerging lexicon, spatial morphology, and basic argument structure suggest that, at least in these early stages, vertical changes are characterized by patterns of segmentation, differentiation, and increased specificity.