NEWS RELEASE

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Inventing Languages in the Laboratory

NEW HAVEN — You are locked into a room and must find a stranger who is looking for you. You can communicate with the stranger via computer but you can not use letters or any other commonly used symbol. What do you do? Simple: you invent a language. This is what many people do in Bruno Galantucci’s laboratory at Haskins Laboratories, demonstrating that communication can arise without any pre-established agreement on the signs to be used and on their meaning. These invented languages offer new insights about the nature of human communication. For example, they show how signs are deeply rooted in the fabric of human cooperative action. At the same time, they demonstrate that the hallmarks of human natural languages, for example the use of few arbitrary units that combine with one another, arise fairly quickly in symbolic interactions.

Dr. Bruno Galantucci, a Research Scientist at Haskins Laboratories, studies the full history of these languages in the laboratory, uncovering some of the basic principles behind the origins, as well as the present, of human communication. The first scientific report about this project appeared in a recent issue of Cognitive Science.

Haskins Laboratories was founded in 1935 by the late Dr. Caryl P. Haskins. This independent research institute has been in New Haven, Connecticut since 1970 when it formalized affiliations with Yale University and the University of Connecticut. The Laboratories’ primary research focus is on the science of the spoken and written word.

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