Right off the bat, the first thing I noticed about this paper is how it seems to be very rooted in math and biology. The paper is talking about how language is recursive. Then the paper goes into language needs to be computed by the brain. I have read a few papers and books on language and it always been discussed based on cultural aspects. I have never seen language discussed like this before. I am interested in seeing where the authors go with this.

I am not sure what figure 3 is supposed to represent. There are labels, but the authors are trying to show something with a 3D figure. I am not sure if I am supposed to care about the axes or the volume of the objects themselves. In any case, this is not a good visualization because it is not intuitive at all. Even the description is not helpful.

Hauser et al then start a section about the comparative approach to language evolution. However they do not explain what they are comparing. Are we comparing languages? Are we comparing the biology of different species, I do not understand. This paper is becoming more and more frustrating in this way, the authors do not seem to want to explain anything; they just like to throw out some buzzwords to sound smart.

One example that I found very interesting was the comparison between songbirds and humans. The authors describe that songbirds need to hear other birds of the same species to be able to form songs of their own. They also lose the ability to learn new ways of singing later in life just as humans have a harder time learning new languages. I wonder what other animals share similar traits. The authors seemed to spend a lot of time on this example, but I am not sure why.

Hypothesis 2 seems to be contradicted by hypothesis 3. H2 is that “FLB is a derived, uniquely human adaptation for language”, while H3 states “only FLN is uniquely human”. If the authors are trying to show that only FLN is uniquely human, then that would contradict that FLB is a uniquely human adaptation. The authors do not seem to make much of an acknowledgement of this paradox. They do say that the term adaptation separates the two later in the paper, but that, according to the authors is arguable. I think the authors should have explained why they were making contradictory claims and how it would be helpful to have a definite answer for either. That does not seem possible though, because then the authors go on to say that the data needed to find these answers are not available. Hauser et al. seem to be running around in circles with the paper with no clear path or point.

One really interesting point that the authors made is that no other species has the capacity to combine “meaningful units into an unlimited variety of larger structures”. This directly relates to the book Orality vs. Literacy by Walter Ong. In that book, Ong describes how without writing, human language, human thought was nothing like it is now. I wonder, what would happen if Monkeys started to make drawings on the barks of trees. And from there, giving meaning to those images, their mental capacity might change dramatically as well. It is not language in general that differentiates humans from other species, it is simply that humans have found a way to convert language into symbols.

Overall, I am disappointed in this paper. Every other sentence seemed to be “there is no data to back up this conclusion”. Hauser et al. continue to make statements and then go on to say that there is no way to confirm their statement at this moment. To that, add the confusing language and style in which it was written, this turned out to be an average paper in my eyes.
First of all, I had never heard of the story about the monks with the mile long wire and were all given electric shocks. Just like Karahalios says, this was a big deal. I had no idea people were looking into sending signals over long distances without the need for a messenger at this point. As far as I knew the first real exploration did not occur until the 1800s. I also am surprised this story is not referred to more often. One would think that with it being one of the first known occasions where a signal was sent like this, people would use it more often. I was also really surprised to learn that Morse Code took some time before people started to become interested in it. I wish I knew what people were thinking back then to think that this type of communication was a bad thing. However, it could all revolve around the idea that anything new or different tends to scare the general population.

On the other side of things, the Hole-In-Space project was a new and different one. The exhibit did not have any explanation but in this case people were not scared. It only took a few days for people it to become part of a normal social activity. I wonder what the difference between this project and the introduction of Morse code was. Both systems were out of the ordinary, what made people interested in this one.

Karahalios includes a list of components of communication. I have been looking for a similar list with no luck for my own research. It was very interesting to see such a list. I wonder what the difference between message content and purpose is. I imagine that purpose will describe what is contained in the message content, but I suppose Saville-Troike will have explained that in the book (hopefully).

One thing about the ChitChatClub that made me wonder was why the remote user was in this secluded area. Why not install more avatars in different cafes. That way, all the users can be in more publically social space. I imagine that the remote user’s experience was much different that the one’s in the café. And while this interface may be an enjoyable one for the café users, who is to say that the remote user will like being cooped up in a private space like this when one’s friends are in a fun café around other people. I would have liked to see this study redone with avatars placed in different cafes. This way all of the users are remote or café users. There is no distinction and the users have the same distractions and benefits.

The expression wheel is a very interesting. I find the wheel a little hard to read, but that could just be because of the image and resolution of my monitor. I do not think the gradient was very helpful though. While this was seemed to be an improvement over the last iteration for expressions in ChitChatClub, I was especially impressed by the abstracted continuous emotion wheel. Not only was it aesthetically beautiful, but it was also was able to perform the intended function. If I were doing a user study for something like this, this interface would definitely have been my favorite.

The Carousel project confuses me a bit. What do people gain from seeing a space in its entirety? Since there is a microphone involved, it makes me think that people can talk to each other. However, if people are talking to each other and the camera is rotating, do people have to walk in circles to stay in each other’s view? Or is the purpose to be static and only let the camera get a glimpse of the user once every revolution. Even the people who witnessed the Carousel in action were confused on what to do. With this confusion, I do not find this to be as successful as some of the other projects described in this paper.
Article:Primates on Facebook (The Economist)
Maintained Relationships on Facebook (Facebook)

The Economist article describes how even though it is easier to keep in contact with others, by using social networking sites, like Facebook, people tend to have a relatively small core of people that they have regular communication with. The article mentions that the number of core friends is on a downward trend and this was found in a study, however I do not understand what they mean by this. The only thing I can imagine is that they mean the number of core friends is moving downwards compared relatively to one’s social network size. If the Dunbar number was the size before, and now some people can have 400-500 “friends” on Facebook, one still only has contact with about less than 30 of those people. The article, I think, found a very good way of describe what these social networks sites are doing. These sites are allowing people to broadcast their lives, like a blog, so that others if they have the time or curiosity can find out what is going on in one’s life.

In the Facebook article, it was interesting that the Killworth et al. study found that people know between 300 and 3000 people in their lifetimes. To some extent, with people claiming that they have over 500 friends on Facebook, and Facebook, as stated in the article has only been around for 5 years, I wonder if 3000 is too small of a number. The rest of the article basically summarized the findings of the researchers. I thought that all of the visualizations that the article included were very good. They were easy to understand still looked good.