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UCT lecture explores the formal foundations of natural language

University of Cape Town (UCT) philosopher, [Professor Ryan Nefdt](#), will deliver his inaugural lecture, "Language, Patterns and Automata: The Algorithms Behind Linguistic Reality", on Wednesday, 20 May 2026 at 18:00 at the Mafeje Room, Bremner Building, lower campus.

Professor Nefdt's lecture will explore the formal foundations of natural language, presenting the view that language consists of real patterns grounded in both cognitive structures and social use. He will examine how grammars can be understood as formal compression algorithms, bridging theoretical linguistics, philosophy and computational approaches.

The lecture will engage with key debates in the philosophy of science and linguistics, offering new ways to understand language, meaning and intelligence in an era shaped by artificial systems.

"The reason for the topic is that my research has centred around the question of what natural language is. This question connects to multiple disciplines and is arguably one of the most profound issues in the human sciences. The account I offer provides insight into language evolution, computational problems in AI and the cognitive science of language," explained Nefdt.

Nefdt is a professor in the [Department of Philosophy](#), working at the intersection of philosophy of language, linguistics and cognitive science. His research focuses on the foundations of linguistic theory and the role of formal models in explaining language.

He is the author of several books and has received multiple awards, including the National Research Foundation P-rating and the Universities South Africa medal for emerging researcher in the humanities and social sciences.

- Members of the media wishing to attend the lecture are requested to [RSVP](#) via email.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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