Formal models of grammar aim to describe the implicit knowledge that underlies speakers’ ability to produce well-formed complex sentences. Because such knowledge can only be ascertained indirectly through experimental tasks and observations of language use, it is often unclear how to distinguish the effects of grammatical constraints from the effects of extra-grammatical factors, such as processing difficulty. The current book project builds on existing empirical research to develop a framework in which data from various sources can be interpreted to describe grammatical knowledge more accurately. It is argued that some grammatical knowledge is probabilistic, thus challenging commonly-held assumptions in linguistic theory.

Medieval Multiples: Twins in Medieval Culture and Literature

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In the Middle Ages, the rarity of the twin-births resulted in wide-spread and pronounced fascination due to the unusual combination of rarity AND possibility. This inter-disciplinary project examines the medieval fascination with “twinness” in a study that consists of three parts: 1) an analysis of demographics of twin births in the Middle Ages and of real-life twins in their particular historical contexts (such as the aristocratic Beaumont twins); 2) an examination of how medieval medical, obstetrical, and gynecological texts understood procreative processes that produced twins; and 3) how medieval literature used the idea and the theme of twins to raise, explore, and resolve myriad social, political, and religious issues.

When: Wednesday, March 23, 2016
Time: 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Where: Pfendler Hall, Dean’s Auditorium (Room 241)