

Linguistics 355: Child Language Acquisition

Lawrence University, Winter 2012

TR 9:00-10:50 am

105 Main Hall

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Office Hours: TR 11 am - noon and by appointment

Course Web Site: <http://moodle.lawrence.edu>

Course Description:

Every normally developing human acquires language in early childhood, a capacity that is unique to humans. This course presents an introduction to the study of child language acquisition—the study of how this feat is accomplished. This is a topic that is addressed by researchers in several different disciplines; we will be focusing primarily on approaches to this topic within the field of linguistics, although we will also look at research done by psychologists. In this course we will examine some of the central questions and theoretical debates that have informed the study of child language acquisition, including: How, and to what extent, are humans biologically pre-programmed to acquire language, and what role do the environment and experience play? What aspects of language acquisition are universal, and in what ways does the acquisition process vary from language to language, or from child to child? We will also look at some of the methods that have been employed to collect and analyze child language data, and you will have opportunities to work with and analyze actual child language data. Throughout the course, we will also consider how the study of child language acquisition contributes to the broader goal of understanding the nature of human language.

Objectives:

In this course, you will:

1. Identify research questions appropriate to the discipline and explain why they are important, i.e., how answering them contributes to the understanding of the nature of human language.
2. Become familiar with some of the methods that researchers use to collect and analyze child language data.
3. Practice interpreting the results of child language research.
4. Critically read and evaluate published research on child language acquisition.
5. Critically examine the past research on one topic related to child language acquisition and assess how the understanding of this topic has changed over time.

Required Readings:

There is one required textbook for this course; additional required readings are listed on page 5 and in the schedule and are available in electronic form through Moodle.

Textbook: Lust, Barbara. 2006. *Child language: Acquisition and growth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Course requirements:

Broadly speaking, the requirements for this course are attendance, engagement with the material (in readings and in activities that we do in class), participation, and several assignments. The assignments for this course are designed to provide you with opportunities to (1) develop and demonstrate your ability to engage with published research, (2) become familiar with methods of data collection and analysis and apply them to answering research questions, and (3) contribute to productive discussions about the nature of language and language development. The specific requirements are:

Reading & Participation. Active participation in class is the way in which you and your fellow students will receive the greatest benefit from this course. Thus the most basic, and important expectation is that you be in class and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings. This means that you will have read all the material before you come to class and that you will have thought about it with respect to the basic concerns of the course. I do not intend to spend much time lecturing; rather, I expect that we will engage together to understand the work that we read, the author's goals, and its consequences for our understanding of the nature of language. Other specific expectations related to participation include:

- Contribute to discussions about the readings
- Complete ungraded in- and out-of-class tasks (exercises, etc.)
- Meet with me during office hours (or by appointment) at least once during the term

We will create a rubric for assessing participation and, at the end of the term, each student will complete a self-assessment of their participation in the class; the final grade for the participation will be the average of the instructor's assessment and the student's self-assessment.

Weekly discussion questions. Each week that there is a textbook reading assigned for Tuesday (i.e., every week except the first week of class and the week of midterm reading period) you will submit discussion questions about that week's chapter to a discussion forum on the Moodle site. You should also read other students' questions before coming to class. This will assist in your preparation for our in-class discussions and will help me to be sure that we focus on topics that are most interesting and/or challenging to understand.

Lab readings and writing assignments. Several of the course objectives are concerned with becoming familiar with various aspects of the process of conducting research in this discipline. Unfortunately it is impractical to practice experimental child language research in the time we have available to us during the term. Instead, we will use a series of published articles to conduct a series of 'virtual' labs, in which we will follow the authors' research process by working through each article in parts and going through the process of selecting research methods, analyzing data, and interpreting the results. Each of these "lab readings" will be accompanied by several assignments. There are four total articles that we will use for labs; the first one will be ungraded to familiarize you with the process and the work that you will produce; the remaining three will be graded. For each article you will create a concept map of the introduction to the article, a cartoon or diagram representation of the methods used in the study, templates that describe the information contained in each table and figure in the results section, and a write-up in which you interpret the results and propose a follow-up experiment to address unanswered questions. We will discuss all of these, and how they will be graded, in more detail in class.

Annotated Bibliography. In place of a final exam or traditional term paper, the final project for this course will be an annotated bibliography in which you select a topic related to child language acquisition that is of interest to you and survey the research that has been done on that topic. You will identify 6 studies (journal articles or book chapters) on the topic, read them, and write annotations that summarize, evaluate, and contextualize the study; you will also write a brief essay in which you synthesize the articles in your bibliography to characterize how the knowledge and understanding of your topic has changed over time. We will begin working on this project early in the term with in-class opportunities to discuss your progress. You will earn part of your grade for the proposal by completing various steps in the process during the term. A sample annotated reference will be available on Moodle; I recommend that you look at it early in the term so that you have a sense of what is expected on this assignment.

Grading:

Grades for this course will be based on a 100-point scale; points will be allocated to the various graded assignments as follows:

Discussion questions (8)	8 points
Lab readings assignments:	
• Concept maps (3)	6 points (2 each)
• Methods diagrams (3)	6 points (2 each)
• Table/figure templates (8)	16 points (2 each)
• Write-ups (3)	30 points (10 each)
Annotated bibliography assignment	24 points (20 points for the final assignment, 4 for steps)
<u>Participation</u>	<u>10 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

Final grades will be based on the sum of points earned for all graded assignments. At the end of the term, cumulative points totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

94-100 pts	A	74-76 pts	C
90-93 pts	A-	70-73 pts	C-
87-89 pts	B+	67-69 pts	D+
84-86 pts	B	64-66 pts	D
80-83 pts	B-	60-63 pts	D-
77-79 pts	C+	< 60 pts	F

Course Policies:

Attendance. Regular, on-time attendance is expected and required, and it is impossible to participate in class if you are not present. However, I do recognize that situations sometimes arise that are out of your control and require attention. If you must miss class I ask that you let me know ahead of time if possible that you will be absent. If you miss more than 1 or 2 class meetings (2 class meetings is more than 10% of the course), you should be sure to meet with me to discuss the situation and your progress in the course.

Late Work. Assignments will be turned in online through Moodle unless otherwise noted. Late assignments will not be accepted without an outstanding reason unless you have made a prior

arrangement with me. If there is a reason that you feel might affect your ability to complete the assignment on time, I am happy to discuss the situation with you ahead of the due date and arrange for an extension if that is appropriate.

Classroom Environment. Some of the topics that we will discuss in this course are challenging and potentially sensitive. It is important that we maintain an open and respectful environment during our discussions and that everyone should feel comfortable participating and that they and their opinions are respected, even if others disagree with them. If at any point you feel that this environment is in danger or that the classroom environment is presenting a barrier to your full participation in the course, please come see me as soon as possible so that we can work together to remedy the situation.

Office Hours & Appointments. I am available during my office hours to answer questions or discuss anything about this course, or linguistics in general. If your schedule makes it impossible for you to come to my scheduled office hours, please e-mail me to arrange an appointment at a mutually convenient alternate time. Please include in your e-mail several potential meeting times when you will be available and keep in mind that it is unlikely that I will be able to make an appointment less than 48 hours in advance.

E-mail. E-mail is the best way to contact me with short questions, comments, or to make appointments. I cannot respond to longer or more complicated questions/issues by e-mail, but I am happy to discuss them with you in office hours or to make a separate appointment if you are unable to come to office hours. I will make an effort to respond to e-mail as soon as possible and during the week you can usually expect a response within 24 hours. Though I may sometimes be able to respond to e-mail received over the weekend, please do not expect to hear from me between Friday afternoon and Monday morning or during vacations. When sending e-mail, please include a descriptive subject (e.g., "Ling 355 Homework").

Accommodations. If you have any specific needs that must be met in order for you to participate fully in the course, including a documented need for accommodations due to physical, learning, or other disabilities, please let me know at the beginning of the term so that we can make arrangements for accommodations.

Honor Code/Academic Integrity. You are all aware of the Lawrence University Honor Code. Scholastic dishonesty documented on any work for this course will be referred to the honor council. If you have any question about what type(s) of collaboration, if any, may be permitted on any assignment for this course, be sure to consult with me. You should be particularly aware of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of cheating in which you use someone else's ideas and/or words (including those of your roommate, classmate, parent, significant other etc.) without proper citation of the source. It is plagiarism regardless of whether the material comes from a printed source, from the Internet or from a lecture or a friend: If you got the idea from someone else, you must cite the source properly—and this is true even if you aren't using the source's exact wording. If you are at all unsure about proper ways to cite the source(s) of information you are using, be sure to consult me or another resource; the writing tutors at the CTL can also assist you.

Supplemental Readings:

- Baldwin, D. A., Markman, E. M., Bill, B., Desjardins, R. N., Irwin, J. M., & Tidball, G. (1996). Infants' reliance on a social criterion for establishing word-object relations. *Child Development, 67*, 3135-3153.
- Chien, Y. C., Lust, B., & Chiang, C. P. (2003). Chinese children's comprehension of count-classifiers and mass-classifiers. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics, 12*, 91-120.
- Crain, S., & Nakayama, M. (1987). Structure dependence in grammar formation. *Language, 63*, 522-543.
- Curtiss, S., Fromkin, V., Krashen, S., Rigler, D., & Rigler, M. (1974). The linguistic development of Genie. *Language, 50*, 528-554.
- Eimas, P. D., Siqueland, E. R., Jusczyk, P., & Vigorito, J. (1971). Speech perception in infants. *Science, 171*(3968), 303-306.
- Foley, C., Núñez del Prado, Z., Barbier, I., & Lust, B. (2003). Knowledge of variable binding in VP-ellipsis: Language acquisition research and theory converge. *Syntax, 6*, 52-83.
- Goldin-Meadow, S., & Feldman, H. (1977). The development of language-like communication without a language model. *Science, 197*, 401-403.
- Kuhl, P. K., Williams, K. A., Lacerda, F., Stevens, K. N., & Lindblom, B. (1992). Linguistic experience alters phonetic perception in infants by 6 months of age. *Science, 255*, 606-608.
- Lasnik, H. (2002). The minimalist program in syntax. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 6*, 432-437.
- Naigles, L. (1990). Children use syntax to learn verb meanings. *Journal of child language, 17*, 357-374.
- Newport, E. L. (1990). Maturation constraints on language learning. *Cognitive Science, 14*, 11-28.
- Palmer-Brown, D., Tepper, J. A., & Powell, H. M. (2002). Connectionist natural language parsing. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 6*, 437-442.
- Petitto, L. A., & Marentette, P. F. (1991). Babbling in the manual mode: Evidence for the ontogeny of language. *Science, 251*, 1493-1496.
- Senghas, A., Kita, S., & Özyürek, A. (2004). Children creating core properties of language: Evidence from an emerging sign language in Nicaragua. *Science, 305*, 1779-1782.
- Tardif, T., Gelman, S. A., & Xu, F. (1999). Putting the "noun bias" in context: A comparison of English and Mandarin. *Child Development, 70*, 620-635.
- Werker, J. F., Gilbert, J. H. V., Humphrey, K., & Tees, R. C. (1981). Developmental aspects of cross-language speech perception. *Child Development, 52*, 349-355.

Schedule (this schedule is subject to change as necessary; students will be made aware of any changes as far in advance as possible):

Reading: Students in jigsaw group A should read those article marked (A); those in group B should read the articles marked (B).

Everyone should read the textbook chapters and lab readings.

Discussion questions: The weekly(-ish) discussion questions should be submitted for chapters 4-11 in the textbook. They are not listed in the ‘Assignments Due’ column, but they should be posted Mondays by 5pm (except for week one and the week of reading period).

Lab readings assignments: Concept maps, methods diagrams, and completed table/figure templates are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated. Write-ups of lab readings are due by midnight (on Moodle) on the days indicated.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
Jan. 3	First day		
Jan. 5	The Problem	Lust Ch. 2 & Ch. 3	
Jan. 10	Theory	Lust Ch. 4; lab 1 intro	T: Bring 3 possible bibliography topics
Jan. 12		Lasnik (A); Palmer-Brown et al. (B); lab 1 methods	
Jan. 17	Brain	Lust Ch. 5; lab 1 results	
Jan. 19		Curtiss et al. (A); Newport (B)	Th: Bring biblio. topic & 1 reference
Jan. 24	Nature/Nurture	Lust Ch. 6; lab 2 intro	T: Lab 2 concept map
Jan. 26		Senghas et al. (A); Goldin-Meadow et al. (B); lab 2 methods	Th: Lab 2 methods diagram
Jan. 31	Methods	Lust Ch. 7; lab 2 results	T: Lab 2 table/figure templates
Feb. 2		Werker et al. (A); Eimas et al. (B)	F: Lab 2 write-up
Feb. 7	Methods	TBD	T: Bring 1 annotated reference
<i>No Class – Mid-Term Reading Period</i>			
Feb. 14	Phonology	Lust Ch. 8; lab 3 intro	T: Lab 3 concept map
Feb. 16		Kuhl et al. (A); Petitto & Marentette (B); lab 3 methods	Th: Lab 3 methods diagram
Feb. 21	Syntax	Lust Ch. 9; lab 3 results	T: Lab 3 table/figure templates
Feb. 23		Crain & Nakayama (A); Foley et al. (B)	F: Lab 3 write-up
Feb. 28	Semantics	Lust Ch. 10; lab 4 intro	T: Lab 4 concept map
Mar. 1		Chien et al. (A); Baldwin et al. (B); lab 4 methods	Th: Lab 4 methods; full list of ref's
Mar. 6	Language Growth	Lust Ch. 11; lab 4 results	T: Lab 4 table/figure templates
Mar. 8		Tardif et al. (A); Naigles (B)	F: Lab 4: write-up
Mar. 14	Annotated Bibliography Due @ noon		