

**Linguistics C146/Psychology C143: Language Acquisition**  
**Summer 2014, 213 Wheeler Hall**

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**Course overview**

This six-week summer course is an introduction to major topics in the study of language acquisition for students in linguistics and cognitive science. Coursework will be focused on three major themes:

1. The acquisition of the mechanics of language:
  - a. The native language phonology and early speech production
  - b. The early development of linguistic structure
  - c. Word learning by infants and young children
2. Variation in first language acquisition:
  - a. Spoken vs. signed language acquisition
  - b. Abnormal language acquisition and acquisition disorders
  - c. Bilingual first language acquisition
3. Similarities and differences between first language acquisition in childhood and second language acquisition in adulthood

**Course objectives**

This course has two major goals. First, students will be exposed to work on language acquisition from a variety of perspectives to deepen their understanding of the topic and how it relates to language use more broadly. Second, class discussion will encourage students to consider how research on language acquisition informs our understanding of learning and cognition more generally.

**Readings**

Course readings will be drawn from research articles and book chapters on language acquisition. We will read works from the experimental literature, as well as theoretical perspectives on language acquisition and linguistic structure. Students will engage directly with the scientific literature and practice their critical assessment of scholarly examinations of the topic. I will post key questions and concepts prior to each assignment to help structure your approach to each reading.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss their reactions to the readings. Reactions can include questions or clarifications on material that you found challenging or unclear, critiques of the approach taken by the author(s), and/or suggestions for work that could follow-up on the argument put forward in the paper. There will be in-class time devoted to discussion of the readings.

**Course website**

Course policies, readings, and assignments can be found on our class bCourses site (via [bcourses.berkeley.edu](http://bcourses.berkeley.edu)). You will need to use the site regularly to access course information and materials. I'll also be using the site to make course announcements, so make sure your notifications are turned on. If you need help, please see the ETS support site at <http://ets.berkeley.edu/bcourses/support>.

### **Grading**

Your course grade will be out of 400 points, broken down as follows:

Homework assignments (4)	240 points (60 pt. each)	60% of final grade
Final exam	60 points	15% of final grade
Final paper	80 points	20% of final grade
Class participation	20 points	5% of final grade

I reserve the right to curve the final grades. If I decide to do so, the class median will be no lower than a B, and nobody's grade will be lowered. In other words, if you earn a 90% of all possible points, your final grade will be no lower than a 90%.

### **Homework policy**

Homework assignments are designed to reinforce the major topics that are covered in class and readings. They will give you a chance to think critically about the concepts we discuss and to apply them to new problems or scenarios. You may work on homework assignments with classmates, but you must write up your responses *in your own words*, and list the names of your collaborators.

You are permitted to write assignments by hand, but if you do, be sure that your handwriting is very legible. If the course grader cannot read your handwriting, it may not be possible to grade it and your homework will be returned to you to be typed, and incur a late penalty.

Homework is due **at the start of class** on the day it is due. Homework turned in after the start of class will be marked as late. Late homework will be docked 10% per day.

### **Final exam**

The in-class final exam will ask you to apply the skills you've acquired in the homework assignments to a comprehensive overview of the material we've covered in the course.

### **Final paper**

In the final paper, you'll design a study to test an original research question that you develop related to some aspect of language acquisition. We'll build up to this assignment throughout the semester by discussing how to identify what types of questions are left open in the papers we read, and what types of techniques you could use to explore those questions using experimental data or existing linguistic data sets. In week 5, you'll be asked to turn in a 1-page description of your paper to ensure that you are making progress and thinking critically about your topic.

### **Participation**

Class participation will be assessed by your attendance in class and by your engagement in class discussions. During each class period, you'll have the opportunity to ask questions and raise discussion points, with the class as a whole and in discussion groups. Often, this will involve a "Question of the Day", where you'll jot down quick thoughts on a piece of paper which I will collect, and then discuss your thoughts with a classmate. Your participation will demonstrate that you have been keeping up with readings and have thought critically about the material.

**Email policy**

On weekdays, I will respond to questions within 24 hours. On weekends/holidays, I may take longer than a day to respond – please plan accordingly. I'll do my best to answer questions via email, but I may ask you to come in for office hours if a question requires a long conceptual explanation. You're encouraged to ask questions about course content in section, so everyone can benefit (if you have a question, the odds are that someone else in the class does too!)

**Office hours**

I encourage you to come to office hours early in the semester, so I can get to know you and learn about your individual goals for the course. If you can't make the scheduled time, I will also offer meetings by appointment – please email me to schedule.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you have been issued a letter of accommodation from the Disabled Students Program (DSP), please see me as soon as possible to work out the necessary arrangements. If you need an accommodation and have not yet seen a Disability Specialist at the DSP, please do so as soon as possible. More information can be found at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu>. If you would need assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation, the DSP recommends that plan for this in advance. (Contact the DSP access specialist at 643-6456.)

**Course outline**

(Subject to change as the course progresses)

**\*Note\*:** All readings are listed on the day they are due. Be sure you've read them before coming to class!

**Week 1: Foundations of language and acquisition**

*Topics: Foundational questions in language acquisition; the debate over language as an innate or learned system*

**7/7:** Course introduction, major themes, background survey

**7/8:** Introduction to language acquisition: What does it mean to know and acquire a language?

- Clark, chapter 1
- **Homework 1 assigned.**

**7/9:** What is the nature of linguistic knowledge? Generative vs. usage-based accounts

- Chomsky (2000), p. 3-10
- Tomasello (2003), p. 1-7

**7/10:** Is there a middle ground?

- "Guide to reading empirical research articles"
- Yang (2004)

**Week 2: Phonology, speech perception, and speech production**

*Topics: Acquisition of the phonology of the first language; anatomical and cognitive development and how it shapes the speech of young children*

**7/14:** Early motor control, babbling, and speech production

- Nip et al. (2011)
- **Homework 1 due.**

**7/15:** Speech perception, learning the phonology of the native language

- Ambridge and Lieven, Chapter 2, p. 47 -60
- **Homework 2 assigned.**

**7/16:** The perceptual assimilation model

- Kuhl et al. (2008)

**7/17:** Distributional cues to speech perception

- Maye, Werker, and Gerken (2002)

### **Week 3: Acquiring words and linguistic structures**

*Topics:* How children acquire words and structure multi-word utterances; generalization. This week, we will also introduce the final project and discuss approaches to developing a language acquisition study.

*Readings:*

**7/21:** Word learning

- Ambridge and Lieven, Chapter 3, p. 61-83
- **Homework 2 due.**

**7/22:** Word learning continued

- Clark (2009), p. 157-175
- Estes et al. (2007)
- **Homework 3 assigned.**

**7/23:** The acquisition of grammar

- Hoff (2009) – **pages TBA in class**

**7/24:** Learning grammatical patterns: the debate over the past tense

- Pinker and Ullman (2002)
- McClelland and Patterson (2002a, 2002b)

### **Week 4: Variation in first language acquisition**

*Topics:* Similarities and differences in the acquisition of signed and spoken languages; investigate some instances of atypical language development

**7/28:** Sign language acquisition: similarities and differences with spoken language

- Petitto (2000)
- **Homework 3 due.**

**7/29:** Sign language acquisition: emergent sign languages and home sign

- Goldin-Meadow and Mylander (1998)
- Senghas et al. (2004)
- **Homework 4 assigned.**

**7/30:** Atypical language development: an overview

- Curtiss (1989)

**7/31:** Atypical language development: specific populations

- Evans et al. (2009)
- Vicari et al. (2002)

**Week 5: Bilingualism in first language acquisition; second language acquisition**

*Objectives:* Examine the ways that children in multilingual environments acquire (or do not acquire) multiple languages; introduce second language acquisition

**8/4:** Bilingual first language acquisition

- Genesee (2006)
- **Homework 4 due.**

**8/5:** Bilingual first language acquisition: phonological acquisition revisited

- Bosch and Sebastián-Gallés (2003)

**8/6:** Bilingualism and the brain

- Costa and Sebastián-Gallés (2014)

**8/7:** Second language acquisition: maturational constraints

- Hytlenstam and Abrahamsson (2000)

**Week 6: Second language acquisition; course wrap-up**

*Objectives:* Continue discussion of topics in second language acquisition and bilingualism; review broad course themes; discuss progress and outstanding issues for final paper

**8/11:** Second language acquisition: maturational constraints continued

- Flege and McKay (2010)

**8/12:** The ups and downs of bilingualism

- Bialystock 2009
- DeGroot 2013

**8/13:** Broad review of course themes

- Come prepared with lingering questions about course materials and topics

**8/14:** Last day of class

- **Final exam**
- **Final paper due**

Readings

Ambridge, B., and Lieven, E.V. (2011). *Child Language Acquisition: Contrasting Theoretical Approaches*. Cambridge University Press.

Bialystok, E. (2009). Bilingualism: The good, the bad, and the indifferent. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 12(01), 3-11.

Bosch, L., & Sebastián-Gallés, N. (2003). Simultaneous bilingualism and the perception of a language-specific vowel contrast in the first year of life. *Language and Speech*, 46(2-3), 217-243.

Chomsky, N. (2000). *New horizons in the study of language and mind*. Cambridge University Press.

Clark, E. V. (2009). *First language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.

Costa, A., & Sebastián-Gallés, N. (2014). How does the bilingual experience sculpt the brain? *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 15(5), 336-345.

Curtiss, S. (1989). Abnormal language acquisition and the modularity of language. *Linguistics: the Cambridge survey v. II: Linguistic theory: Extensions and Implications*, Frederick Newmeyer (ed.). 96-116.

De Groot, A. (2013). Bilingualism and Cognition. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*.

Estes, K. G., Evans, J. L., Alibali, M. W., & Saffran, J. R. (2007). Can infants map meaning to newly segmented words? Statistical segmentation and word learning. *Psychological Science*, 18(3), 254-260.

Evans, J. L., Saffran, J. R., & Robe-Torres, K. (2009). Statistical learning in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 52(2), 321-335.

Flege, J. E., & MacKay, I. R. (2010). "Age" effects on second language acquisition. In *Proceedings from the Sixth International Symposium on the Acquisition of Second Language Speech*, eds. K. Dziubalska-Kolaczyk, M. Wrembel and M. Kul.

Genesee, F. (2006). Bilingual first language acquisition in perspective. *Childhood bilingualism: Research on infancy through school age*, 45-67.

Goldin-Meadow, S., & Mylander, C. (1998). Spontaneous sign systems created by deaf children in two cultures. *Nature*, 391(6664), 279-281.

Hyltenstam, K., & Abrahamsson, N. (2000). Who can become native some, or none?. *Studia linguistica*, 54(2), 150-166.

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Kuhl, P. K., Conboy, B. T., Coffey-Corina, S., Padden, D., Rivera-Gaxiola, M., & Nelson, T. (2008). Phonetic learning as a pathway to language: new data and native language magnet theory expanded (NLM-e). *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 363(1493), 979-1000.

Maye, J., Werker, J. F., & Gerken, L. (2002). Infant sensitivity to distributional information can affect phonetic discrimination. *Cognition*, 82(3), B101-B111.

- McClelland, J. L., & Patterson, K. (2002a). 'Words or Rules' cannot exploit the regularity in exceptions. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 6(11), 464-465.
- McClelland, J. L., & Patterson, K. (2002b). Rules or connections in past-tense inflections: What does the evidence rule out?. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 6(11), 465-472.
- Nip, I. S., Green, J. R., & Marx, D. B. (2011). The co-emergence of cognition, language, and speech motor control in early development: A longitudinal correlation study. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 44(2), 149-160.
- Petitto, L. A. (2000). The acquisition of natural signed languages: Lessons in the nature of human language and its biological foundations. In Chamberlain, Charlene (Ed); Morford, Jill P. (Ed); Mayberry, Rachel I. (Ed), *Language Acquisition By Eye* (41-50). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Pinker, S., & Ullman, M. T. (2002). The past and future of the past tense. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 6(11), 456-463.
- Senghas, A., Kita, S., & Özyürek, A. (2004). Children creating core properties of language: Evidence from an emerging sign language in Nicaragua. *Science*, 305(5691), 1779-1782.
- Tomasello, M. (2003). *Constructing a language: A usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Harvard University Press.
- Vicari, S., Caselli, M. C., Gagliardi, C., Tonucci, F., & Volterra, V. (2002). Language acquisition in special populations: a comparison between Down and Williams syndromes. *Neuropsychologia*, 40(13), 2461-2470.
- Yang, C. D. (2004). Universal Grammar, statistics or both? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 8(10), 451-456.