

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

LING 5110: Language Acquisition

Fall 2017

Wednesdays, 1:30-4:30 PM; OAK 338

Instructor: Diane Lillo-Martin

Course Description

Introduction to the relationship between linguistic theory and children's grammars.

Course Requirements

- Assigned readings. Please be prepared to discuss readings as indicated for each class meeting. Participation in classroom discussion is a valuable part of the learning process.
- By the Tuesday (midnight) prior to each class, students should post on HuskyCT a comment or question about the reading(s) assigned for that week. This can be something that wasn't clear, something that wasn't convincing, or a reaction to the claims (theoretical or empirical), for example. These comments and questions will be included in the discussion for each week.
- Student project formulating and examining a question in language acquisition (see separate document for detailed information).
 - A written proposal for the project is due Oct. 31.
 - Each student will give a brief presentation of their project to the class Nov. 29 or Dec. 6.
 - The written paper is due Dec. 13.

Communication

If you have questions about anything in the course (or related matters) you can raise them during class, or you can feel free to meet with me outside of class (my office is in OAK 352; you can try dropping by, but it's usually best to ask me for an appointment). I'm also quite reachable by email: diane.lillo-martin@uconn.edu

Schedule (subject to adjustment)

[Papers indicated in square brackets are optional]

THE CHOMSKIAN PERSPECTIVE

Aug. 30 The Logical Problem of Language Acquisition: Children know more than the input provides. The Chomskian solution is to posit innate knowledge which guides acquisition.
Readings: Chomsky (1965, chapter 1; especially sections 4 – 8)

Sept. 6 No class (GALA conference)

THE PARAMETER-SETTING MODEL

Sept. 13 Parameter-setting as an account of the time-course of language development.
Readings: Chomsky (1981, chapter 1); Snyder & Lillo-Martin (2011) [Chomsky (1986, chapter 1)]

THE NATURE OF THE INPUT

Sept. 20 Is the assumption that the input is insufficient well-grounded?
Readings: Newport, Gleitman & Gleitman (1977); Thomas (2002)

Sept. 27 Arguments that it's in the input after all.
Readings: Aslin & Newport (2012)

AREAS OF EARLY ACQUISITION

- Oct. 4** Evidence that (in some ways) children know more than the input provides, from early on – acquisition is ‘as if instantaneous’.
Readings: Crain (1991 target article; commentaries optional)

WHEN ACQUISITION IS NOT INSTANTANEOUS – PROPOSED EXPLANATIONS

- Oct. 11** Competence or performance? [null subjects]
Readings: Hyams (1986, chapter 3); Valian (2016); [Bloom (1990)]
- Oct. 18** How does the learning of morphology affect language acquisition? [optional infinitives]
Readings: Wexler (1998); Grinstead (2016)
- Oct. 25** Do children adopt non-target parameter settings? [WH-questions]
Readings: McDaniel et al. (1995); Thornton (2016)

Project proposal due Tuesday, Oct. 31

- Nov. 1** Are there delays in pragmatic development? [principle B]
Readings: Chien & Wexler (1990); Baauw (2016)
- Nov. 8** Guest lecture: William Snyder
Does grammar undergo maturation? [passives]
Readings: Borer & Wexler (1987); Snyder & Hyams (2015); [Becker & Kirby (2016)]

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS PROVIDING EVIDENCE FOR THE CHOMSKIAN PERSPECTIVE

- Nov. 15** Critical period effects and genetic factors
Readings: Newport (1990); Guasti (2002, chapter 11); [Ganger (2016)]
- Nov. 22** **Thanksgiving recess**

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

- Nov. 29** Presentation of student projects
- Dec. 6** Presentation of student projects

Ling 5110 Fall 2017 Readings

- Aslin, R.N. & Newport, E.L. (2012). Statistical learning: From acquiring specific items to forming general rules. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 21(3), 170–176.
- Baauw, Sergio (2016*) The acquisition of binding and coreference.
- Becker, Misha & Kirby, Susannah (2016*) A-Movement in language development.
- Bloom, Paul (1990) Subjectless sentences in child language. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21, 491-504.
- Borer, Hagit, & Wexler, Kenneth (1987) The Maturation of Syntax. In T. Roeper & E. Williams (eds.), *Parameter Setting*, 123-172. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Chien, Yu-Chien & Wexler, Kenneth (1990) Children's knowledge of locality conditions in binding as evidence for the modularity of syntax and pragmatics. *Language Acquisition* 1, 225-295.
- Chomsky, Noam (1965) *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam (1981) *Lectures on government and binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Chomsky, Noam (1986) *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use*. New York: Praeger.
- Crain, Stephen (1991) Language acquisition in the absence of experience. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 14, 597-612.
- Ganger, Jennifer (2016*) The genetics of spoken language.
- Guasti, Maria Teresa (2002). *Language Acquisition: The Growth of Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Grinstead, John (2016*). Root infinitives in child language and the structure of the clause.
- Hyams, Nina (1986) *Language Acquisition and the Theory of Parameters*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- McDaniel, D., Chiu, B., & Maxfield, T. (1995). Parameters for Wh-Movement Types: Evidence from Child Language. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 13, 709-753.
- Newport, Elissa L. (1990) Maturational constraints on language learning. *Cognitive Science* 14, 11-28.
- Newport, Elissa L., Gleitman, Henry & Gleitman, Lila R. (1977) Mother, I'd rather do it myself: Some effects and non-effects of maternal speech style. In Catherine Snow & Charles Ferguson (eds.), *Talking to Children: Language Input and Acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Snyder, William & Hyams, Nina
- Snyder, W. & Nina Hyams. (2015). Minimality effects in children's passives. In Elisa Di Domenico, Cornelia Hamann & Simona Matteini (eds.) *Structures, Strategies and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Adriana Belletti (Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today)*, 343-368. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Snyder, William & Lillo-Martin, Diane (2011) Parameter Setting. In P. Hogan (ed.), *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences*.
- Thomas, Margaret (2002) Development of the concept of "the poverty of the stimulus." *The Linguistic Review* 19, 51-71.
- Thornton, Rosalind (2016*) Acquisition of questions.
- Valian, Virginia (2016*) Null subjects.
- Wexler, Kenneth (1998) Very early parameter setting and the Unique Checking Constraint: A new explanation of the optional infinitive stage. *Lingua* 106, 23-79.

*In Jeffrey Lidz, William Snyder & Joe Pater (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Linguistics*.