



SPN 6735: Child Language Acquisition: Western Romance

Fall 2010

Place: W Rol 205, period 405-705pm

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Office hours:
M, W 1-2
and by special appointment

Course Overview: This course is an introduction to child language acquisition primarily (but not exclusively) from the generative perspective. Beyond general theory, there will be a focus on looking at the acquisition of western Romance languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan). However, the theory, which transcends any one language or family of languages and any one property of language, is the important component of the class. Students from Linguistics and other related specializations are permitted to do their projects on the language of their choice, to be discussed with and approved by the professor no later than the 3rd week of class.

This course will introduce you to formal/cognitive linguistic approaches to child language acquisition. We seek to understand on the one hand the learning task of language acquisition as it relates to children while on the other how theoretical accounts describe and explain how children come to be proficient speakers of the language(s) in their environment. We will focus on the acquisition of syntax, morphology and semantics, while touching upon pragmatics, the lexicon and phonology. To that end, we will read and discuss a combination of teaching texts and authentic articles from the literature. The goals of this course are to train you to (a) think like a linguist who researches language acquisition, (b) conduct authentic research and (c) to analyze and critique data that helps to explain the questions we seek to weigh in upon. Essentially, research is guided by 2 main questions:

- (a) **Linguistic description:** What is language and how is it manifested in particular grammars?
- (b) **Linguistic explanation:** How does language come to be acquired, represented in the mind/brain of individual speakers?

Required Texts:

- (a)** How Children Learn Language, O'Grady (2005) Cambridge University Press
- (b)** An Introduction to Linguistic Theory & Language Acquisition (1991/1999) – Crain & Lillo-Martin Blackwell Publishing
- (c)** The Acquisition of Spanish (2004) – Montrul John Benjamins Publishing
- (d)** Assigned articles (see list below): given copyright laws students are required to copy their own articles/chapters that form part of the required readings yet are not contained in the required books. These articles are highlighted below in the course plan.

Student responsibilities:

2. **Assigned readings:** The class will be divided in two sections and this will be reflected in the readings. For the first part of the class (roughly through week 9), we will read the O'Grady book (very general, overview text) as well as other general introductions of a more theory specific nature. The goal of these readings and the first part of the class is to examine the very phenomenon of child language acquisition, understand its complexity and develop the ability to extract the questions that are relevant from a linguistic standpoint: What do children have to do? And How is it that children are able to accomplish this task? The second part of the course will use primarily the Montrul book as a base and original articles on the acquisition of Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan. The goal of this second part is for you to appreciate the questions that linguists ask and think about how you can contribute to these questions, to add another piece of the puzzle that is attempting to understand this process and its outcomes in a critical way. Readings are assigned in the daily plan of the course.

For each reading assignment, you are expected to answer a general set of questions as follows, which are meant to help you to extract from the reading the relevant information. You will type the answer to these questions and bring two copies with you to class to help facilitate the discussions we will have about the readings and related topics (i.e., one for you to keep and the other to be turned in to me).

Questions for the readings

Who is the author?

In a few sentences, what do you think is the main point of the chapter/article?

If applicable, what is/are the language(s) under investigation?

If applicable, what are the specific properties under investigation? Summarize how the author describes how they are accounted for in linguistic terms.

What is the theory that is assumed in the chapter/article?

What macro and micro questions, if applicable, is the author trying to weigh in on or explain to the readers?

What is the author able to support through the empirical work and/or discussion presented?

If applicable, what is the methodology employed by the author or the main evidence given to support the epistemological argument?

Is the author able to convincingly support what he/she sets out to accomplish and in what ways?

What questions now follow from what the author has presented?

Can you think of any counter examples that seemingly contradict or question the author's contentions?

What are the broader implications as it relates to generalizability, verifiability and the like that follow from the author's line of argumentation?

Are there any criticisms you can see in any part (from methodology to argumentation to interpretation of the arguments offered) that you can offer?

Are there any specific points that you do not agree with, if so, why not and what do you offer as evidence for the basis of your exception? What is the alternative to the issues that you have that you propose?

What are the points that you did not fully understand? Of these issues that are less than clear, what do you think the author is trying to say?

3. Attendance policy: This is a graduate class and so it is assumed that you are here to learn as much as you can. Therefore, you are not permitted to be absent without very good reason (e.g. presenting at a conference, too ill to attend class and the like) and you should let me know of any planned absences in advance. If you are absent more than once, your grade will be lowered by one level per absence (A to A-), if unexcused. This is because it is virtually impossible to make up what you will have lost from missing class discussions. Recall that we meet once a week, so missing 2 classes is actually missing two whole weeks of class. Periodically, I will travel to give lectures and for other academic responsibilities, but you will always have

class. Please make sure you are on time so as to not disrupt the class with late arrivals, especially on days that we have a guest speaker.

4. Guest speakers: We are fortunate enough to have several guest lectures from major researchers in the field. On occasion, they will be here in person and more typically they will present through video-conferencing. On these days in particular, please make sure that you do an excellent job with the readings and come prepared to ask question. Everyone should have at least one question to ask the guest. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to become more acquainted with scholars in the field, but also a great opportunity to ask the author questions you might have about his/her work. Of course, since they are our guests we want to make sure that we treat them with the utmost respect whether or not we have some issues with their studies. That said, we all love to be challenged and you are encouraged to respectfully do so.

Grading:

Grade Scale

The final grade scale is as follows:

A = 100-93	C(S) = 76-73
A- = 92-90	C-(U) = 72-70
B+ = 89-87	D+ = 69-67
B = 86-83	D = 66-63
B- = 82-80	D- = 62-60
C+ = 79-77	E = 59-0

The course grade will be calculated as follows:

Active participation in class	25%
Written homework for the readings	25%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Project Proposal	25%
Proposal Presentation	15%

Class participation: is expected and worth 25% of your grade. Everyone starts today with full credit for participation. Coming to class is NOT participating. Participating is the thoughtful demonstration of preparedness for class as well as engagement in discussion topics. There is NO such thing as a stupid question, so please ask as many as come to you. I LOVE to be challenged, so please do so and your comments are always welcome. I just ask that anything you say in class is sensitive to others in the class. Having questions and comments is what active participation entails.

Homework: As stated above, your task while you read is to extract from the readings the points that the author is attempting to make. You WILL not understand everything, and that is not only fine but to be expected. If you do not understand something, especially technical things, please note this and we can discuss this in class. However, it is expected that you have a general understanding of the main findings or points and you should read things until such is accomplished (maybe twice if need be). The written assignment for readings is meant to help guide you through the reading in a very general way, the reason why the same set of non-specific questions, I believe, cover all the readings for this class. You will not receive letter grades for the homework, but full credit or no credit for doing it (or not). We will immediately go over these questions in small groups as well as an entire class during the course of our meetings. For this reasons, you bring two printed copies to class so that you have yours to take notes on as the discussion unfolds. To that end, I suggest leaving space for each question for you to write notes during class discussion.

Requirements for written homework:

1. All written work (with the exception of tree diagrams and phonetic transcriptions) must be done by computer, double-spaced, leaving ample margins on the sides (preferably, 1½") for comments from your TA.
2. YOU MUST RE-TYPE THE QUESTION, so as to provide you with a context for comments once you receive the homework back. Failure to include the original questions in your homework will lower the grade by one notch (A→ A-). If you plan ahead you can ask your TA to e-mail a version of the homework in word format so you may cut and paste the questions.
3. Assignments of more than one page must be stapled together.
4. Assignments must be handed in prior to the beginning of class on the day that they are due, left on the table at the front of the room. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail, either as attachments or in the body of the message.
5. Late assignments will receive NO credit.

Annotated Bibliography: No later than week three, you will pick a language (for Spanish and Portuguese studies students this can be any language spoken in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula; for Linguistic students this can be any language of our mutual agreement) and a specific linguistic property in that language that you would like to investigate. Upon the 8th meeting of our class, you must turn in an annotated bibliography for 5 articles related to this topic that you read independently of the articles/chapters read for class. The annotated bibliographies cannot exceed 500 words each for each article. Your topic must be approved by me no later than week three of class.

Project Proposal: Using the same topic chosen for your annotated bibliography, you will design a research proposal not to exceed 7 pages typed, single spaced. In this proposal you will have the following sections:

- (a) An general introduction including some details on the subject population and the relevance of examining this for specific questions relevant to theoretical points covered in class;
- (b) the research questions and hypotheses;
- (c) an linguistic explanation of the grammatical property of your choice
- (d) a detailed SAMPLE methodology;
- (e) a general discussion and conclusion.

The goal is to provide you with an opportunity to learn how to design an experiment from the bottom up such that you might be able to realize this project in the future.

Proposal presentation: During the last class and on the day/time of our scheduled final (unless we agree to another, equal time before that scheduled final time), you will be responsible to present to the class your project proposal. You must use a power point to do this and provide an informative handout to your classmates. You should follow the sections in your proposal itself to present this information.

Other information:

Please turn off cellular phones during class and please make every effort to arrive on time to class ready for discussion. Being more than 7 minutes late to the start of the course will count as an absence on each third occasion of such tardiness.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All students are required to abide by the Academic Honesty Guidelines which have been accepted by the University. The UF Honor Code reads:

We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” For more information please refer to <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide>.

Accommodations

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. For more information see <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>.

If you feel at any point that you need to speak with a counselor, please know that the University provides such services and that they are available to you.

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Class schedule*: The order of readings may change based on speaker availability and the natural progression of the course.

WEEK	DATE	Units	MODULE/ACTIVITIES	ASSIGNMENT(S) DUE
1	Aug. 25		Introduction to course, syllabus <i>Introduction</i> <i>What is the task of language acquisition?</i>	O’Grady (2005) Chapter 1 and 2 (pages 1-40)

2	Sept. 1		Deriving meaning from input. The beginning stages of syntactic	O'Grady (2005) Chapters 3 and 4
3	Sep. 8		The meaning of child sentence production	O'Grady (2005) Chapters 5 and 6
4	Sep. 15		How do children do it?	O'Grady (2005) Chapter 7
5	Sep. 22		The generative theory of language acquisition	Crain and Lillo Martin (1991/1999) Chapter 1 Montrul (2004) Chapter 1 pages 1-15
6	Sep. 29		Bigger questions in generative theory: (a) Descriptive vs. Explanatory Adequacy (b) Links between acquisition and other sub-disciplines of linguistics	Pires and Rothman (2009). Child and adult language acquisition, linguistic theory and(microparametric) variation. In Pires, A. & Rothman, J (eds.). <i>Minimalist Inquiries into Child and Adult Language Acquisition: Case Studies Across Portuguese</i> . Berlin/New York: Mouton DeGruyter 5-33
7	Oct. 6		What is the logical problem? Poverty of the stimulus	Rothman and Iverson (2008) Poverty-of-the-stimulus and L2 Epistemology: Considering L2 Knowledge of Aspectual Phrasal Semantics. <i>Language Acquisition</i> 15, 4 270-314 Lawrence, S. and Margolis, E. (2001) The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument. <i>British Journal Philosophical Sciences</i> , 52 217-276
8	Oct. 13		Emergentism: Special Guest Lecture by William O'Grady via video conferencing	O'Grady, W. (2008). Does Emergentism Have a Chance?. In <i>Proceedings of the 32nd Annual BUCLD</i> . Somerville: MA Cascadilla Press, 16-35 Reminder: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE
9	Oct. 20		Theory of Mind and Acquisitional Implications	Papafragou, Anna (2002) , Modality and theory of mind: Perspectives from language development and autism. In <i>Modality and Its Interaction with the Verbal System</i> , Sjef Barbiers, Frits Beukema and Wim van der Wurff (eds.), 185-204. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
10	Oct. 27		Special Guest Lecture by Juana Licerias; Professor Licerias will be in class with us.	TBA
11	Nov. 3		Plural Morphology	Miller, K. and Schmitt, C. (2009). Syllable-final /s/ lenition and the acquisition of plural morphology in Spanish-speaking children. In Grinstead, J. <i>Hispanic Child Languages: Typical and impaired development</i> . Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 3-27 Montrul: Chapter 2 pages 51-61
12	Nov. 10		Subject Pronouns Special guest lecture by John Grinstead via video-conferencing.	Grinstead, J, and Spinner, P. (2009). The clausal left periphery in Child Spanish and German. <i>Probus</i> , 21, 51-81. Montrul: Chapter 4 pages 175-182; 190-197
13	Nov. 17		Syntax of the VP	Gavarró, A. and Cabré-Sans, Y. (2009). Subjects, verb classes and word order in child Catalan. . In Grinstead, J. <i>Hispanic Child Languages: Typical and impaired development</i> . Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 3-27 Montrul: Chapter 3 85-125
14	Nov. 24		Inflected infinitives (obligatory and non-obligatory Control) Special guest lecture by Ana Lúcia Santos via video-conference.	Pires, Rothman and Santos (in press). L1 Acquisition of interface properties across Portuguese dialects: Internal and external factors as sources of delayed acquisition. <i>Lingua</i> 121
15	Dec. 1	Class presentations	Presentation of Project Proposals; Class evaluations	Project Proposal Due
16	Dec. 8		Presentations of Project Proposals	

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