Semantics Seminar
Language Acquisition
Spring 2018

Instructor: Kristen Syrett (kristen.syrett (at) rutgers.edu)

Classes: Mondays 1:10 - 4:10 pm, Linguistics Department (18 Seminary Place), room 108
Office hours: Thursdays 11:00 am – 12:30 pm and by appointment
(in my office on CAC, my lab on Busch, or via Skype)

Course Introduction and Objectives
The job of a linguist is to scientifically study language in order to capture and explain patterns of linguistic structures and language usage. In doing so, we propose hypotheses that are clear and testable, and aim to arrive at theories with explanatory power. These theories should not only effectively explain the idiosyncratic properties of a single language, but illustrate properties that hold across languages, and bear on how we acquire language, why languages vary, and how languages change. The relevance of a hypothesis and a theory to the process of language acquisition is one of the ways in which it can be evaluated. Every linguist – even a pure theoretician who never intends to conduct an experiment, analyze corpora, or make contact with a baby – should be well versed in language acquisition and the issues that are central to linguistic development. The objectives of this class are twofold. First, it will introduce you to the topic of language acquisition by exploring some of core issues, debates, lines of evidence, and methodologies in language acquisition. Second, it will invite you to get your feet wet and your hands dirty by reading core articles, analyzing data, and designing experiments on your own.

Course Learning Goals
In this course, you will
• become exposed to a range of foundational work in language acquisition
• become acquainted with both sides of key debates that have advanced our understanding of the language acquisition process (and at times polarized researchers)
• connect core issues in linguistic theory and the process of language acquisition
• become familiarized with a number of experimental techniques used to collect and/or analyze empirical language acquisition data in linguistics and psychology
• critically evaluate previously-collected data that were collected by researchers using these methodologies

Your requirements

(1) Participation 10%
You must attend every class and participate.

(2) Class Presentation on a Predetermined Topic 10%
Each of you will select one topic/paper to present in class from the list provided. All presentations must be done via slides. You will not be allowed to use handouts, unless it is for an in-class activity. You should meet with me 1-2 weeks before you are assigned to present with a draft of your presentation ready to discuss with me, and we will work together on developing your presentation. Everyone who is enrolled/auditing is required to complete this component. Sign up for a class topic now!
(3) **Hands-on work with child language data**  
There will be two in-class projects in which you will work together in small groups to collect and/or analyze data and propose an account of the patterns you see in child-directed and child-produced speech. We will be making use of the CHILDES database for these projects.

(4) **Final Project and Paper**  
Each of you will propose a language acquisition experiment (or small set of 1-3 experiments) and write a final paper outlining this experiment using the format of a language acquisition article. The experiment should be in response to a theoretical puzzle or phenomenon or an open question about language acquisition and development. All students registered for the class or regularly auditing are required to complete this component!

**Important Deadlines for (4)**  
Language Acquisition project and final paper  
2- to 3-page summary of idea: April 2  
Statement of hypotheses, proposal of methodology, and list of key references: April 9  
1- to 2-page summary, outline of experiment, annotated references, sample stimuli: April 16  
Lightning talk on topic: April 30  
Final paper: May 4

**SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Meeting</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 22</td>
<td>Introduction: The Importance of Language Acquisition</td>
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<td>January 29</td>
<td>Distributional information in the input: Rules or statistics, dependencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>Distributional information in the input: Statistical information and segmentation</td>
<td>Hazel (Saffran)</td>
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<td>February 12</td>
<td>Word learning: Concepts, Constraints, Principles [data set #1]</td>
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<td>February 19</td>
<td>Word learning: The Linguistic Context (Syntactic Bootstrapping)</td>
<td>Yu (Gleitman 1990)</td>
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<td>February 26</td>
<td>Word learning: The Linguistic Context (Frequent frames)</td>
<td>Morgan (Gleitman 2005)</td>
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<td>March 5</td>
<td>Structure Dependence, Poverty of the Stimulus [data set #2]</td>
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<td>March 19</td>
<td>Adjectives, Comparatives</td>
<td>Meg (Barner &amp; Snedeker)</td>
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<td>March 26</td>
<td>Pragmatic Implicatures</td>
<td>Chen (Katsos &amp; Bishop)</td>
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<td>Caley (Skordos &amp; Papafragou)</td>
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<td>Elyesa (Pouscoulous et al)</td>
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<td>April 2</td>
<td>Definites, Determiners</td>
<td>Ang (Caponigro et al)</td>
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<td>April 9</td>
<td>Quantification: Scope</td>
<td>John (Gualmini et al.)</td>
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<td>Vera (Lidz &amp; Musolino 2002)</td>
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<td>April 18 (WED!)</td>
<td>Generics + Disjunction, Conjunction</td>
<td>Shiori (Hacquard &amp; Lidz)</td>
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<td>Haoze (Dudley et al)</td>
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<td>April 23</td>
<td>Attitude Verbs and Question Embedding</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>Lightning Talks on Final Project/Paper Topics</td>
<td>All of you!</td>
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Distributional information in the input

(1) Rules or statistics, Dependencies


(2) Statistical information and segmentation


Word learning: Concepts, Constraints, Principles


Word learning: The Linguistic Context (Syntactic Bootstrapping)


Word learning: The Linguistic Context (Frequent frames)


Structure Dependence, Poverty of the Stimulus


Introduction to Semantics in Language Acquisition


Adjectives, Comparatives


**Pragmatic Implicatures**


**(In)definites, Determiners**


**Quantification: Scope**


**Generics**


**Conjunction, Disjunction**


**Attitude Verbs, Embedded Questions**


**Distributivity**


