

Psych 56L/ Ling 51: Acquisition of Language

Lecture 1 Introduction

Administrivia

Instructor:

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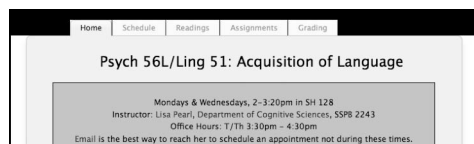


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Class web page:

http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~lpearl/courses/psych56L_2008fall/index.html

Accessible from EEE, as well. Contains overview, schedule, readings, course assignments, and grading policies.



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Readings will be from *Language Development (4th edition)*,
by Erika Hoff



Readings should be read by the day listed

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Assignments

Homework:

Three throughout the quarter, usually due 1 week after they're assigned. Collaboration is allowed and encouraged. However...

You may discuss the homework together, but you must write up your answers separately, and you must write the names of your collaborators on your assignment when you turn it in.

If you do not do both these things, it will be considered academic dishonesty and you will receive a 0 for that assignment.



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Exams

Midterm exam:

There will be a midterm exam on 10/29/08. It will cover the material in weeks 1-4. Review questions will be available for each topic covered in class, and there will be a midterm review in class 10/27/08. Midterm exam questions will come from the homeworks and the review questions.

The midterm exam will be open-note, but non-collaborative. If you are found collaborating with other classmates during the midterm exam, you will receive a 0.

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Exams

Final exam:

There will be a final exam Friday, Dec 12th from 1:30pm - 3:30pm. It will cover the material in weeks 1-10, with a focus on the material in weeks 5 - 10. Review questions will be available for each topic covered in class, and there will be a final exam review the last day of class, 12/3/08. Exam questions will come from the homeworks and the review questions.

The final exam will be open-note, but non-collaborative. If you are found collaborating with other classmates during the final exam, you will receive a 0.

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Grades

Homework: 50%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Final Exam: 30%

There may be extra credit assignments throughout the quarter. Your grades will be determined by approximately this scale:

96.50-100.00: A+	83.50-86.49: B	...
93.50-96.49: A	80.00-83.49: B-	
90.00-93.49: A-	76.50-79.99: C+	
86.50-89.99: B+	73.50-76.49: C	

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Schedule

"This is our wonderfully ambitious schedule. We'll attempt to keep with it, but it is subject to modification."

Topics:

Intro to Language Learning	(9/29-10/1)
Biological Basis of Language	(10/6-10/13)
Sounds	(10/15-10/22)
Words	(10/29-11/5)
Word & Sentence Structure	(11/10-11/17)
Language & Cognition	(11/19)
Childhood Bilingualism	(11/24)
Language in Special Populations	(12/1)

Knowledge of Language

It's so natural for us to produce and comprehend language that we often don't think about what an accomplishment this is.

Or how we learned language in the first place.



About Language

Language is a complex system of knowledge that all children learn by listening to native speakers in their surrounding environment.



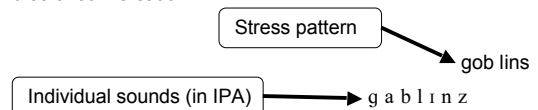
It includes sound structure, word structure, word meaning, sentence structure, mapping from sentence structure to meaning, unspoken rules of conversation...

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goblin (plural) = goblin + s

gob lins

g a b l i n z

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Goblins like children.



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Don't goblins like children?

Goblins like children.



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Some Terminology

Phonology: sounds and sound system of the language

g a b l i n z gob lins

Lexicon: Words and associated knowledge (word forms, word meanings, etc.)

goblins =
(not koblins)



Morphology: system for combining units of meaning together
(goblin + [plural] = goblins)

Some Terminology

Syntax: system for combining words into sentences

Goblins like children.

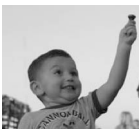


Pragmatics: knowledge of language use

Don't goblins like children? = surprise if the answer is 'no'
(expectation is that the answer is 'yes')
Use this question format to show expectation of a 'yes' answer.

Kids Do Amazing Things

Much of the linguistic system is already known by age 3.



...when kids can't tie their own shoes
or even count to 4.

What kids are doing: extracting patterns and making
generalizations from the surrounding data mostly without
explicit instruction.

Terminology: Patterns or "rules" of language = grammar

Knowledge of Language & Hidden Rules

Some examples from language:

You know that...

...*strop* is a possible word of English, while *stvop* isn't.

Knowledge of Language & Hidden Rules

Some examples from language:

You know that...

... "Who did you see who did that?" is not a grammatical question in English

(Instead: "Who did you see do that?")

Knowledge of Language & Hidden Rules

Some examples from language:

You know that...

...In "She ate the peach while Sarah was reading", *she* ≠ *Sarah*

but *she* can be *Sarah* in all of these:

Sarah ate the peach while she was reading.
While she was reading, Sarah ate the peach.
While Sarah was reading, she ate the Peach.



Knowledge of Language & Hidden Rules

Some examples from language:

You know that...

...the 's' in 'cats' sounds different from the 's' in goblins

cats: 's' = /s/

goblins: 's' = /z/



Possible objections to a mental rule set

"Why should I believe I store a set of rules unconsciously in my mind? I just understand sentences because they make sense."

Possible objections to a mental rule set

"Why should I believe I store a set of rules unconsciously in my mind? I just understand sentences because they make sense."

But why do some sentences make sense and others don't?

Hoggle has two jewels.
*Two Hoggle jewels has.



Possible objections to a mental rule set

Why can we recognize patterns even when some of the words are unknown?

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
did gyre and gimble in the wabe...



Possible objections to a mental grammar

"What about people who speak ungrammatically, who say things like 'We ain't got no bananas'? They obviously don't have grammars in their heads."



Possible objections to a mental grammar

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Prescriptive vs. Descriptive Grammar

Prescriptive: what you have to be taught in school, what is prescribed by some higher "authority"

"Don't end a sentence with a preposition."
" 'Ain't' is not a word."

Possible objections to a mental grammar

“What about people who speak ungrammatically, who say things like ‘We ain’t got no bananas’? They obviously don’t have grammars in their heads.”



Prescriptive vs. Descriptive Grammar

Descriptive: what you pick up from being a native speaker of the language, how people actually speak in their day-to-day interactions

Who does Sarah first talk *with*?

“You’re horrible!” “No, I *ain’t* - I’m Hoggle!”



Possible objections to an unconscious rule set

“When I talk, the talk just comes out - I’m not consulting any rule set.”

Possible objections to an unconscious rule set

“When I talk, the talk just comes out - I’m not consulting any rule set.”

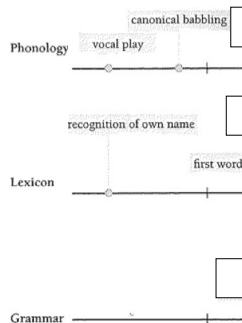


Analogy: wiggling your fingers

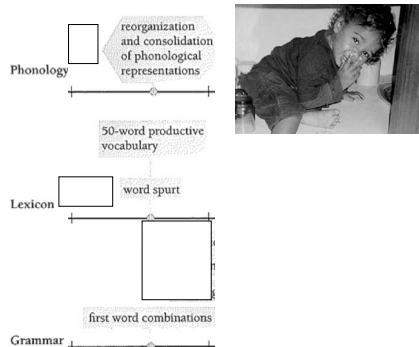
When you want to wiggle your fingers, you “just wiggle them”.

But your finger-wiggling intention was turned into commands sent by your brain to your muscles, and you’re never conscious of the process unless something interferes with it. Nonetheless, there *is* a process, even if you’re not aware of it.

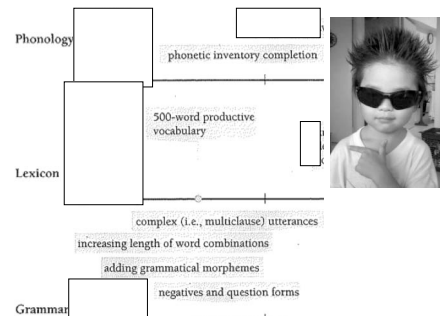
Timeline of Language Development: Year 1



Timeline of Language Development: Year 2



Timeline of Language Development: Year 3-3.5



Why study language development?

The big picture, theoretically speaking:

“Cognitive scientists now agree that it is necessary to understand how the mind works in order to explain human behavior, but they do not agree on how the mind works. The study of language acquisition still plays a central role in the debate over how to characterize human cognition, for the same reason that language acquisition played a central role in the cognitive revolution. That is, it is so difficult to explain how language acquisition is possible that accounting for language acquisition is a test not likely to be passed by inaccurate cognitive theories.” - Hoff, p.8

Why study language development?

More practically speaking, applications of language development research:

- (1) Understanding how normal language development proceeds so that we can help children who have problems with their language development (language pathology)
- (2) Understanding how learning more than one language works, and how to best teach children who are learning multiple languages simultaneously (language pedagogy)

The Interaction of Theory & Practice

These two areas aren't always separate - insights from one can help understanding in the other.

Example: Research on children with autism
(Tager-Flusberg, 1994, 2007)



Autistic children have severe communicative deficiencies. However, they still acquire language structure.
Conclusion: Learning language involves more than learning how to fulfill a need to communicate.

Impact: applied language development research influences understanding of the process of language development

Questions?

