

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
First Term, 2010-2021

Course Title: LING6920 Topics in Language Acquisition

Description:

This course introduces and explores some theoretical and empirical issues in child language acquisition across linguistically diverse bilingual and multilingual contexts. We will compare the language development in monolingual, bilingual and heritage children. A strong emphasis is placed on the interface between theoretical analysis of linguistic phenomena and central research questions in language acquisition. Students are required to conduct a research project using the CHILDES database.

Content, highlighting fundamental concepts

Topics	Key concepts
Theoretical issues in child language acquisition	Formal and functional explanations, nativist and usage-based approaches, domain-general and domain-specific issues, logical problem of language acquisition
Methods and methodological issues in child language acquisition	Longitudinal corpus studies and experimental methods, eye-tracking, density of corpus, statistical learning
Issues in bilingual language acquisition Case studies of bilingual children	Development of bilingual competence in early childhood, language differentiation, cross-linguistic influence, input ambiguity, vulnerable domains
Development of null objects	Object omission in different groups of bilingual children
Acquisition of <i>wh</i> -questions	Fronted <i>wh</i> -questions vs. <i>wh</i> -in situ questions in children acquiring different language pairs
Acquisition of relative clauses	Subject vs object asymmetry, prenominal and postnominal relatives clauses in monolingual and bilingual children

Learning outcomes:

- develop a good grasp of the theoretical and empirical issues that arise in monolingual and bilingual child language acquisition
- identify and address research questions, taking an interdisciplinary perspective on the field of child language acquisition
- appreciate the important relationship between linguistic theory and acquisition research and the centrality of language acquisition in relation to other areas of linguistics
- develop the ability to conduct a small-scale research project on a topic in child language acquisition by using the CHILDES database and programmes
- raise students' awareness of the complexity of language acquisition and deepen their appreciation of children's acquisition of one or more languages
- develop ability to learn, discuss with peers and benefit from peer support

- **Learning activities** (via zoom if face-to-face meetings are not feasible)
- lecture
- use of multimedia materials e.g. audio and video clips
- CHILDES workshops
- Student presentations
- discussion of articles
- projects

Assessment scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
Participation in discussion and presentation of assigned articles	Participation in class (responding to questions about weekly readings and contributing to discussion) and presentations based on assigned articles (via zoom if face-to-face meetings are not feasible)	50%
A language acquisition project that conducts a systematic study of a topic of interest	Term project (written) Term project presentation (oral via zoom if face-to-face meetings are not feasible)	40% 10%

Learning resources for students

Language acquisition:

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

Guasti, T. 2002. *Language Acquisition: The Growth of Grammar*. MIT Press.

Russell, J. 2004. *What is language development? Rationalist, Empiricist and Pragmatist approaches to the acquisition of syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bilingual and heritage language acquisition:

De Houwer, A. 2009. *Bilingual First Language Acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Grüter, T. and J. Paradis. (eds.) 2014. *Input and Experience in Bilingual Development*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Polinsky, M. 2018. *Heritage Languages and Their Speakers*. Cambridge University Press.

Qi, R. 2011. *Bilingual Acquisition of Mandarin Chinese and English: Chinese children in Australia*. Cambria Press.

Silva-Corvalán, C. 2014. *Bilingual Language Acquisition: Spanish and English in the First Six Years*. Cambridge University Press.

Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. *The Bilingual Child: Language Contact and Early Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Feedback for evaluation

Students are welcome to give comments and feedback to the instructor by writing to the instructor or talking to her individually.

Grade descriptors:

Grade	Overall Course [LING6920 Topics in Language Acquisition]
A	<p>Demonstration of a thorough and nuanced understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a high degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with full understanding key issues, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) outstanding ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) outstanding ability to present an assigned topic and write an original term paper.
A-	<p>Demonstration of a thorough understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a high degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with only minor weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) excellent ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) excellent ability to present an assigned topic and write an original term paper.
B	<p>Demonstration of a good understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with some weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) good ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) good ability to present an assigned topic and the write a well-organized term paper.
C	<p>Demonstration of an adequate understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with some weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) adequate ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) adequate ability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.
D	<p>Demonstration of some understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and limited competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with major weaknesses in understanding a spectrum of topics, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) weak ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) weak ability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.
F	<p>Demonstration of minimal understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, with very limited competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts, lacking understanding across a spectrum of topics, showing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) inability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) inability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.

Course schedule

Class/ week	Topic
Week 1 & Week 2	<p>Research issues in child language acquisition: an introduction</p> <p>Guasti, M. T. 2002. Ch.1 Basic concepts.</p> <p>Newmeyer, F. 1998. Ch1.The form-function problem in linguistics, pp.1-21.</p> <p>Newmeyer, F. 2003. Grammar is grammar and usage is usage. <i>Language</i> 79.4.682-707.</p> <p>Evans, N. and S. Levinson. 2009. The myth of language universals: language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> 32. 429–492.</p> <p>Behrens, H. 2009. Usage-based and emergentist approaches to language acquisition <i>Linguistics</i> 47: 383–411.</p> <p>Eisenbeiß, S. 2009. Generative approaches to language learning. <i>Linguistics</i> 47: 273–310.</p>
Week 3	<p>Input and language acquisition</p> <p>Crain, S. and P. Pietroski. 2002. Why language acquisition is a snap. <i>Linguistic Review</i> 19:163-183.</p> <p>Pullum, G. and B. Scholtz. 2002. Empirical assessment of stimulus poverty arguments. <i>Linguistic Review</i> 19: 9-50.</p> <p>MacWhinney, B. 2004. A multiple process solution to the logical problem of language acquisition. <i>Journal of Child Language</i> 31: 883-914.</p> <p>Gathercole, V. C. M., and E. Hoff. 2007. Input and the acquisition of language: Three questions. In E. Hoff & M. Shatz (eds.), <i>The Handbook of Language Development</i>, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 107-127.</p> <p>Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Ch2. Section 2.2 The logical problem of bilingual acquisition and the poverty of the dual stimulus, pp.30-33.</p>
Week 4	<p>Methods and methodological issues in child language acquisition</p> <p>Oakes, L. M. 2012. Advances in eye tracking in infancy research. <i>Infancy</i> 17.1. 1-8</p> <p>Huetting, F., Rommers, J., and Meyer, A. S. (2012) Using the visual world paradigm to study language processing: a review and critical evaluation. <i>Acta Psychologica</i> 137 151-171.</p> <p>Tomasello, M. and D. Stahl. 2003. Sampling children's spontaneous speech: How much is enough? <i>Journal of Child Language</i> 41: 101-121.</p> <p>Klee, Thomas, Stephanie F. Stokes, Anita M-Y. Wong, Paul Fletcher and William J. Gavin. 2004, Utterance length and lexical diversity in Cantonese-speaking children with and without SLI. <i>Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research</i> 47: 1396-1410.</p>

	<p>Maslen, R., A. Theakston, E. Lieven and M. Tomasello. 2004. A dense corpus study of past tense and plural overregularization in English. <i>Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research</i> 47: 1319-1333.</p> <p>Blom, E. and S. Unsworth (eds.) 2010. <i>Experimental Methods in Language Acquisition Research</i>. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.</p> <p>Hoff, E. (ed.) 2011. <i>Research Methods in Child Language: A Practical Guide</i>. Wiley-Blackwell.</p>
<p>Week 5 & Week 6</p>	<p>Issues in bilingual language acquisition</p> <p>Serratrice, L. 2013. Cross-linguistic influence in bilingual development: determinants and mechanisms. <i>Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism</i> 3.3-25.</p> <p>Silva-Corvalán, C. 2014. Ch3. Bilingual development: a linguistic profile of the first six years. pp. 54-119.</p> <p>Yip, V. 2013. Simultaneous Language Acquisition. In F. Grosjean and L. Ping <i>Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism</i>, Wiley-Blackwell.</p> <p>Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Ch2. Theoretical framework.</p> <p>Bialystok, E. and J. Werker. 2017. Editorial: The systematic effects of bilingualism on children's development. <i>Developmental Science</i> 20.1. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/desc.12535</p> <p>Ferjan Ramirez, N., Ramirez, R.R., Clarke, M., Taulu, S., Kuhl, P.K. (2016). Speech discrimination in 11-month-old bilingual and monolingual infants: A magnetoencephalography study. <i>Developmental Science</i> http://ilabs.washington.edu/sites/default/files/Ramirez_et_al_2016_DevSci.pdf</p>
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Heritage language acquisition</p> <p>Benmamoun, E., S. Montrul and M. Polinsky. 2013. Heritage languages and their speakers: opportunities and challenges for linguistics. <i>Theoretical Linguistics</i> 39. 129–181.</p> <p>Polinsky, M. 2015. When L1 becomes an L3: Assessing grammatical knowledge in heritage speakers/learners. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 18:163-178.</p> <p>Kupisch, T. and Rothman, J. (2016) Terminology matters! Why difference is not incompleteness and how early child bilinguals are heritage speakers. <i>International Journal of Bilingualism</i>. ISSN 1756-6878 doi: 10.1177/1367006916654355</p> <p>Scontras, G, Z. Fuchs and M. Polinsky. 2015. Heritage language and linguistic theory. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> 6.1545.</p>

Week 8	<p>Acquisition of right dislocation</p> <p>Notley, A., E. van der Linden and A. Hulk. 2007. Cross-linguistic influence in bilingual children: the case of dislocation. In S. Baauw, F. Drijkoningen & M. Pinto (eds.), <i>Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2005: Selected papers from 'Going Romance'</i>, Utrecht, 8-10 December 2005 (pp. 229-259). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.</p> <p>Ge, H., S. Matthews., L. Cheung and V. Yip. 2017. Bi-directional cross-linguistic influence in Cantonese-English bilingual children: the case of right-dislocation. <i>First Language</i> 37. 3. 231-251. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723716687955</p> <p>Hulk, A. & Müller, N. 2000. Bilingual first language acquisition at the interface between syntax and pragmatics. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 3.227-244.</p>
Week 9	<p>Null objects and argument structure</p> <p>Pérez-Leroux, A., M. Pirvulescu, & Y. Roberge, Y. 2008. Bilingualism as a window into the language faculty: the acquisition of objects in French-speaking children in bilingual and monolingual contexts. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 12: 97-112.</p> <p>Pirvulescu, M., A. Pérez-Leroux, Y. Roberge, N, Strik & D. Thomas. 2014. Bilingual effects: Exploring object omission in pronominal languages. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 17: 495-510.</p> <p>Yip, V. & S. Matthews. 2007. Ch5. Null objects: dual input and learnability. In <i>The Bilingual Child: Early Development and Language Contact</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Graf, E., Theakston, A., Lieven, E., & Tomasello, M. 2014. Subject and object omission in children's early transitive constructions: A discourse-pragmatic approach. <i>Applied Psycholinguistics</i>, 36, 701-727.</p>
Week10	<p>Acquisition of complex constructions</p> <p>Park-Johnson, S. 2016. Crosslinguistic influence of <i>wh</i>-in-situ questions by Korean-English bilingual children. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1367006916629224</p> <p>Strik, N. 2012. Wh-questions in child bilingual acquisition of French: derivational complexity and cross-linguistic influence. <i>Revue Canadienne de linguistique/ Canadian Journal of Linguistics</i> 57.1. 133-156.</p> <p>Soriente, A. 2007. Cross-linguistic and cognitive structures in the acquisition of <i>wh</i>-questions in an Indonesian-Italian bilingual child. In I. Kecskes & L. Albertazzi (eds.) <i>Cognitive Aspects of Bilingualism</i>, 325-362.</p> <p>Yip, V. & S. Matthews. 2007. Ch4. Wh-interrogatives: to move or not to move? In <i>The Bilingual Child: Early Development and Language Contact</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</p>

Week 11 & Week 12	<p>Acquisition of relative clauses</p> <p>Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Relative clauses in Cantonese-English bilingual children: typological challenges and processing motivations. <i>Studies in Second Language Acquisition</i> 29. 277-300.</p> <p>Chan, A., S. Chen, S. Matthews and V. Yip. 2017. Comprehension of subject and object relative clauses in a trilingual acquisition context. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01641</p> <p>Chan, A., W. Yang, F. Chang and E. Kidd. 2017. Four-year-old Cantonese-speaking children's on-line processing of relative clauses: A permutation analysis. <i>Journal of Child Language</i> DOI: 10.1017/S0305000917000198</p> <p>Kidd, E., A. Chan and J. Chiu. 2015. Cross-linguistic influence in simultaneous Cantonese-English bilingual children's comprehension of relative clauses. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 18.438-452.</p> <p>Chen, J. and Y. Shirai. 2014. The acquisition of relative clauses in spontaneous child speech in Mandarin Chinese. <i>Journal of Child Language</i> 20:1-29.</p> <p>Hsu, N., G. Hermon and A. Zukowski. 2009. Young children's production of head-final relative clauses: elicited production data from Chinese children. <i>Journal of East Asian Linguistics</i> 18. 323-360.</p>
Week 13	Student presentations of term project

Teacher's contact details

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:	Professor Virginia Yip
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- **A facility for posting course announcements**

All announcements of the course will be circulated and posted by group email.

- **Academic honesty and plagiarism**

“Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With the final term project, students will be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.”
For the written paper, you must attach a statement with signed declaration for academic honesty.

