

## Language Acquisition

Type of course: BA.AA.SW08 (*Aufbaumodul Linguistics*)  
 Time: Thursday 12–2 p.m. (12:15–13:45)  
 Venue: Carl-Zeiss-Str. 3, SR 226  
 Workload: 5 ECTS



### Course description

This seminar explores major phenomena and developmental milestones of first language acquisition. In doing so, we will introduce the scientific questions that linguists have been trying to address, the different kinds of data that they typically turn to, and the conclusions they have drawn from them regarding the nature of language learning. Importantly, in this semester we will broaden our perspective to take both monolingual and bilingual children into account, so that we can also tackle issues such as language differentiation in bilingual newborns and infants, patterns of cross-linguistic influence, the role of the age of onset of bilingualism, the influence of environmental and affective variables on bilingual development, and possible effects of a multilingual upbringing on cognitive development more generally. Throughout the course, our focus will be on the acquisition of phonological and grammatical structures. Methodologically, we will look into an array of different techniques for studying child language, from observational methods such as corpus-based analyses to experimental and behavioural data and their statistical evaluation. The course will thus enable students to read the research literature on first language acquisition and to present and discuss such research in their own written work.

### Requirements and marking system

- regular **attendance**, active **participation** and thorough weekly **preparation** (see below)
- presentation of a **research article** in class (in pairs or small groups)
- term paper = **research portfolio** (approx. 12–15 pages, due on **27 March 2020**), three structured tasks:
  - bibliographical research: bibliography on a predefined topic
  - research report: description and discussion of a predefined journal article on bilingual development (alternative: printed and revised version of your presentation)
  - independent study and presentation of a topic in bilingualism going beyond the seminar

### Weekly preparation

The seminar discussion is based on obligatory weekly texts (see course programme for details). It is crucial that you come to class thoroughly prepared since the texts will generally serve as an important basis for the ideas to be developed in our discussions.

*A general note on your preparation:* Since a B.A. seminar is supposed to provide a chance to practise the in-depth reading, analysis and discussion of academic texts, the amount of time that you'll probably need to put into the weekly preparation of each session is not to be underestimated! Please remember that the course is worth 5 ECTS (which amounts to a sum total of 150 hours of work).

### The course management system

The course management system of our department, called **WORDWISE**, will be the online platform of this class. It is there that you download the preparatory texts, follow-up handouts and materials, etc. Important information on the organisation of the course (e.g. announcements etc.) will also be distributed via **WORDWISE** (to your email address). Therefore, please enrol into this course on **WORDWISE** (the password was announced in class) and stay updated.

## Course programme

DATE	CONTENTS AND LITERATURE	KNOW-HOW AND ISSUES
	<b>Foundations of the study of language acquisition</b>	
1	17.10.19 <i>Goals and scope of the course. Organisation. Issues and research interests in language learning.</i>	Reactivating your knowledge of linguistics.
2	24.10.19 <i>The basic 'puzzle' of language acquisition and two major theoretical positions towards it. Developmental milestones and key phenomena in FLA.</i>	Competing theoretical approaches. Introduction to learner corpora (CHILDES). Analysis of observational data.
3	07.11.19 <i>Clancy 2014</i>	
4	14.11.19 <i>Methodological paradigms for studying FLA. Research principles and quality criteria. Publication types in linguistics and their accessibility (library, databases, etc.).</i>	Important basic terms and concepts of scientific research. Data collection methods and logic of statistical testing. Classification of publications. Abstracts.
5	21.11.19 <i>Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: Ch.2 (10–42). Guidelines for Writing Papers in Linguistics</i>	
	<b>Speech perception and statistical learning</b>	
6	28.11.19 <i>Segmentation of the speech stream into words. Saffran et al. 1996</i>	Structure of an empirical study. <b>Presentation:</b> <i>Marcus et al. 1999</i>
7	05.12.19 <i>Development of speech perception. Tuning in to the phonological structure of the native language. Werker and Tees 1984</i>	<b>Presentation:</b> <i>Mampe et al. 2009</i> Optional post-seminar texts: <i>Werker 1989, Rowland 2014: Ch. 2</i>
8	12.12.19 <i>Language differentiation in bilingual development. Hoff 2013: 261–269</i>	Challenges of defining and studying bilingualism.
	<b>Aspects of grammatical development</b>	
9	19.12.19 <i>Input effects in monolingual FLA. No reading. Suggested preparation: Task 1 of your research portfolio</i>	Statistical learning in grammar. <b>Presentation:</b> <i>Akhtar 1999</i>
10	09.01.20 <i>Input effects on code mixing in bilingual development. Comeau et al. 2003</i>	<b>Assignment:</b> Submit a scientific poster on Comeau et al. 2003.
11	16.01.20 <i>Transfer effects in bilingual development. Yip and Matthews 2000</i>	Autonomous versus interdependent development of grammatical systems.
	<b>Individual differences in language development</b>	
12	23.01.20 <i>The bilingual environment and language choice. Suggested reading: Task 2 of your research portfolio</i>	<b>Poster presentations and gallery walk:</b> <i>De Houwer 2007, Tuominen 1999, Shin 2002</i>
13	30.01.20 <i>Speed, accuracy and dominance in development and early age effects Hoff 2013: 269–279</i>	Empirical assessment of commonly held assumptions and beliefs about bilingual development.
	<b>Wrap-up and outlook</b>	
14	06.02.20 <i>Preparation of the term paper. Outlook on multilingualism in the classroom. Course evaluation. Optional text: Hofer 2015: Ch.8</i>	Please bring any remaining questions.

## Core bibliography (General course texts)

- Clancy, Patricia M. (2014). First language acquisition. In: *How Languages Work: An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Ed. Carol Genetti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 318–350.
- Comeau, Liane, Fred Genesee and Lindsay Lapaquette (2003). The modeling hypothesis and child bilingual codemixing. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 7.2: 113–126.
- Hofer, Barbara (2015). *On the Dynamics of Early Multilingualism*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. [Ch.8]
- Hoff, Erika (2013). *Language Development*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. [Ch. 9]
- Karmiloff, Kyra and Annette Karmiloff-Smith (2001). *Pathways to Language: From Fetus to Adolescent*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. [Ch. 2]
- Rowland, Caroline (2014). *Understanding Child Language Acquisition*. Abingdon: Routledge. [Ch. 2]
- Saffran, Jenny R., Richard N. Aslin and Elissa L. Newport (1996). Statistical learning by 8-month-old infants. *Science* 274: 1926–1928.
- Yip, Virginia and Stephen Matthews (2000). Syntactic transfer in a Cantonese-English bilingual child. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 3.3: 193–208.
- Werker, Janet F. (1989). Becoming a native listener. *American Scientist* 77.1: 54–59.
- Werker, Janet F. and Richard C. Tees (1984). Cross-language speech perception: Evidence for perceptual reorganization during the first year of life. *Infant Behavior and Development* 7: 49–63.

## Texts for presentations

- Akhtar, Nameera (1999). Acquiring basic word order: Evidence for data-driven learning of syntactic structure. *Journal of Child Language* 26: 339–356.
- de Houwer, Annick (2007). Parental language input patterns and children's bilingual use. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 28: 411–424.
- Mampe, Birgit, Angela D. Friederici, Anne Christophe and Kathleen Wermke (2009). Newborns' cry melody is shaped by their native language. *Current Biology* 19: 1994–1997.
- Marcus, G.F., S. Vijayan, S. Bandi Rao and P. M. Vishton (1999). Rule learning by seven-month-old infants. *Science* 283: 77–80.
- Shin, Sarah J. (2002). Birth order and the language experience of bilingual children. *TESOL Quarterly* 36.1: 103–113.
- Tuominen, Anne (1999). Who decides the home language? A look at multilingual families. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 140.1: 749–778.