

## Language Acquisition

Type of course: BA.AA.SW08 (*Aufbaumodul Linguistics*)  
 Time: Friday 10-12 a.m. (10:15 - 11:45)  
 Venue: Carl-Zeiss-Str. 3, SR 209  
 Workload: 5 ECTS



### Course description

After having successfully completed their introductory classes in linguistics, students are now ready to become familiar with actual linguistic research, i.e. what a linguistic research question looks like, by which methods and procedures it is tackled, and how it is presented in a professional academic format. In this seminar, we will probe these issues in the field of language acquisition research. Conceptually, we will focus on important developmental milestones and typical phenomena of first language acquisition, and on what the corresponding data reveal about the very nature of language learning. A key question will be to what extent our linguistic knowledge can be built up from the language that surrounds us and whether genetically 'preprogrammed' linguistic knowledge is necessary for language acquisition to be successful. Methodologically, such questions will require us to look into an array of different methods for studying child language, from observational methods such as corpus-based analyses to experimental and behavioural techniques and their statistical evaluation. Accordingly, the central goals of the course are (i) to provide a first insight into processes of language acquisition; (ii) to enable students to read academic literature on language acquisition from a variety of publication types; and (iii) to develop the skills to write a first term paper in linguistics.

### Requirements and marking system

Active class participation  
 Contribution of a report/panel expert OR submission of one homework assignment  
 Term paper (about 12 pages)

In keeping with the *Modulkatalog*, the final mark for the course will be based on the term paper only. The report/homework assignment is still an obligatory requirement for being able to enrol for the term paper (*Vorleistungen*).

### Preparatory literature

The seminar discussion is based on obligatory weekly texts (see syllabus 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 (syllabus)

| DATE        | CONTENTS AND OBLIGATORY LITERATURE   | METHODOLOGICAL KNOW-HOW   |
|-------------|--|---|
|             | <b>Introduction to the study of language acquisition</b>   |   |
| 1 23.10.15  | <i>Goals and scope of the course. Organisation. Issues and research interests in language learning. The basic 'puzzle' of language acquisition and two major theoretical positions towards it.</i> | Ingredients of theory building in science.  |
| 2 30.10.15  | <a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: 1-11 and 18-21.</a>  |   |
|             | <b>Foundations of first language acquisition</b>   |   |
| 3 06.11.15  | <i>Developmental milestones and key phenomena in FLA.</i>  | Introduction to learner corpora (CHILDES). Analysis of observational data.  |
| 4 13.11.15  | <a href="#">Steinberg 1993: ch.1 (3-29).</a>   |   |
| 5 20.11.15  | <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. Classification of publications. |
| 6 27.11.15  |  |   |
|             | <b>Phonological development</b>  |   |
| 7 04.12.15  | <i>Tuning in to the phonological structure of the native language (Successive fine-tuning and L1 commitment).</i>  | <b>Report</b> based on <a href="#">Saxton 2010: 109-119</a> and <a href="#">Werker/Tees 1984</a>                    |
| 8 11.12.15  | <i>Segmentation of the speech stream into words.</i><br><a href="#">Saffran et al. 1996</a>  |   |
|             | <b>Lexical development</b>   |   |
| 9 18.12.15  | <i>Major phenomena and findings on word learning.</i><br><a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: ch.4 (56-79).</a>   | <b>Report</b> based on <a href="#">Tomasello 2003: 82-93</a> and <a href="#">Tomasello 2001</a>                     |
| 10 08.01.16 | <i>A alternative account of word learning processes.</i><br><b>Assignment due</b>  |   |
|             | <b>Morphosyntactic development</b>   |   |
| 11 15.01.16 | <i>Overview of phenomena, findings and interpretations on morphosyntactic development.</i>   | <b>Panels of experts</b> on <a href="#">Tomasello 2002</a>  |
| 12 22.01.16 | <i>The nature and emergence of children's grammar in a usage-based theory of LA.</i><br><a href="#">Tomasello 2000a</a>  |   |
| 13 29.01.16 | <i>A case study: The acquisition of English questions from a usage-based perspective.</i><br><a href="#">Dąbrowska 2000</a>  | Abstracts and ways of quoting in linguistics. <b>Panel of experts</b> on <a href="#">Lieven and Dąbrowska 2005</a>  |
|             | <b>Communicative development</b>   |   |
| 14 05.02.16 | <i>Acquiring pragmatic and discourse-pragmatic competence.</i><br><a href="#">Rowland 2014: 154-173.</a>   |   |
| 15 12.02.16 | <b>Wrap-up and outlook</b><br><i>Technicalities of the term paper. Summary and evaluation of the course.</i><br><a href="#">Guidelines for Writing a Paper in Linguistics</a>                      |   |

## Core bibliography (General course texts)

- Dąbrowska, Ewa (2000). From formula to schema: The acquisition of English questions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 11.1–2: 83–102.
- Karmiloff, Kyra and Annette Karmiloff-Smith (2001). *Pathways to Language: From Fetus to Adolescent*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. [Chapters 1–4]
- Rowland, Caroline (2014). *Understanding Child Language Acquisition*. Abingdon: Routledge. [Chapter 6]
- Saffran, Jenny R., Richard N. Aslin and Elissa L. Newport (1996). Statistical learning by 8-month-old infants. *Science* 274: 1926–1928.
- Steinberg, Danny D. (1993). *An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. London: Longman. [Chapter 1]
- Tomasello, Michael (2000a). The item-based nature of children's early syntactic development. *Trends in Cognitive Science* 4.4: 156–163.

## Texts for reports and panels of experts

- Dąbrowska, Ewa and Elena Lieven (2005). Towards a lexically specific grammar of children's question constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 16.3: 437–474.
- Saxton, Matthew (2010). *Child Language: Acquisition and Development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. [Chapter 5]
- Tomasello, Michael (2003). *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. [Chapters 3.3 and 3.4 on word learning]
- Tomasello, Michael (2002). The emergence of grammar in early child language. In: *The Evolution of Language out of Pre-Language*. Eds. Talmy Givón and Bertram F. Malle. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 309–328.
- Tomasello, Michael (2000b). Do young children have adult syntactic competence? *Cognition* 74: 209–253.
- Werker, Janet F. (1989). Becoming a native listener. *American Scientist* 77.1: 54–59.