PSYCHOLOGY 476/576:LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
WINTER 2010

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Office hours: Tues. 1:30-2:30, Thurs. 11:00-12:00
Blackboard course website: Psy 476/576 (Fall 2010), Language Acquisition

REQUIRED READING:

1) Hoff, E. (2007). Language development. 4th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson
    Learning.

OVERVIEW:

Acquiring language is one of the central accomplishments of human development, in part because language is the medium of choice for a vast range of human communicative interactions. Possessing language makes it possible for us to engage in altogether unique and powerful forms of socio-cultural exchange, knowledge acquisition, and technological sophistication. For all these reasons, the study of language acquisition is a central topic across a diverse set of fields, including psychology, sociology, linguistics, cognitive science, anthropology, philosophy, and computer science.

In this course you will gain exposure to the issues driving current thinking about language acquisition as well as the methodologies that have been developed to investigate these issues. For example, we will consider questions such as the following:

➢ How different are languages really?
➢ Why is it more difficult to acquire a high degree of fluency in a language if you begin in adulthood
    rather than childhood?
➢ What's it like to live without language?
➢ If language is lost – due to accident, illness, or other trauma – to what extent can it be regained?
➢ How do infants make a start at language learning, and how crucial a role do adults play in fostering
    infants' language acquisition?
➢ Is language learning fundamentally different from the acquisition of any other skill?

FORMAT:

Grades for the course will be based on two in-class exams, a group-based language learning endeavor, and a written review/critique of best practices for facilitating language acquisition. Each of the two exams will be worth 25% of your overall mark (50% overall). Your group work will contribute 25%, and your written review/critique 25%.

The exams will take place on Tuesday, Oct 26 and Thursday, Dec. 2. Exams will be short essay format, and study questions to help you prepare for the exam will be posted on Blackboard within the week prior to the exam.

The group-based language-learning endeavor will involve working as part of a small group to design a "Berlitz"-type course for acquiring a language unfamiliar to most of you. As a group you will design the learning "protocol," document your method, and document your learning experience after 4 learning sessions. Each group member will keep a journal with this information, which will be due in class Thursday, Nov. 18.
This "mouths and/or hands"-on language-learning assignment offers an opportunity to experience the challenge of language acquisition first-hand and to reflect on what factors best facilitate second language acquisition in adults. By collecting data on learning experiences as a class we have the opportunity to observe individual differences in language acquisition and the possible influence of various pedagogical techniques for promoting language proficiency. As part of the group project you will each evaluate your own, and each of your group member's, level of effort and involvement in the project.

The review/critique of language acquisition best practices is where you write what you have discovered regarding current research-based knowledge about the best techniques for promoting language acquisition. There are several possible ways to approach this assignment. For example, one way is to consider a range of pedagogical techniques, sifting through the available evidence to identify current best practice. Another way is to focus in detail on one or two methods (e.g., full immersion vs. partial immersion) and review/critique what current research advises regarding the pros versus cons of these methods for promoting language acquisition. Your review/critique should be in the vicinity of 4-5 double-spaced pages in length. It is due latest by 4pm, Monday, Dec. 6 in either digital form or hard-copy delivered to the Psychology Department Main Office.

Extra credit: There are two options for extra credit. The maximum amount of extra credit you can earn is 3% toward your overall grade, and you must select one or the other option (no mixing and matching). **Option 1**: You can participate in Psychology Department research through the Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool. For each credit of participation assigned to Psych 476/576, you can earn a 1% improvement to your final grade, for up to 3%. Also necessary for gaining the extra credit is that you hand in a one-page description of the research you participated in for each of the participation credits. You can gain information by contacting the human subjects coordinator, Ida, by email at hscoord@uoregon.edu. You can also gain additional information by going to the HSP website at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hscoord. **Option 2**: You can locate an empirical article relevant to language acquisition in a major, peer-reviewed journal, summarize it, and evaluate its contribution to our understanding of the human language-making capacity. A terrific critique (target length is 3 double-spaced pages) will earn you the full 3% extra credit. It would be wise to seek approval of your article from me before beginning your evaluation/critique. To receive the extra credit you will need to hand in both a copy of the article and the evaluation/critique.
⇒ Due date for the extra credit work is Friday, Dec. 10, by 4pm, either digitally or in hard copy at the Psychology Department main office.

Tentative Timetable of Events and Accompanying Readings

Week	Topic	Text Readings
Week 1	Language: What is it? Who has it? How do they get it?	Ch 1
Week 2	Basic biology and earlier than you might think	Ch 2
Week 3	Becoming a social adept	Ch 3

Week 4	Listen listen babble babble talk talk	Ch 4
Week 5	Learning words: A rose by any other name…	Ch 5
Week 6	Pattern finding and structure discovery	Ch 6
Week 7	Language, thought, & enculturation	Ch 7
Week 8	Multiple tongues	Ch 8
Week 9	Literacy and beyond	Ch 9
Week 10	Challenge and resilience	Ch 10

Dates of Special Significance:

Oct. 26 (Tuesday)	First exam
Nov. 18 (Thursday):	Group journal/assessment due
Dec. 2 (Thursday)	Second exam
Dec. 6 (Monday):	Best practices paper due
Dec. 10 (Friday):	Extra credit due

THREE IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES:

1. Guidelines for Teaching and Learning: The Psychology Department has developed guidelines for teaching and learning in Psychology. These guidelines can be accessed at the following web address: http://psychweb.uoregon.edu/undergraduates/guidelines

> ➢ Please read these guidelines carefully as they clarify our general expectations and goals for each other in this course.

2. Academic Honesty: As a member of the university community you are expected to be honest and forthright in all your academic endeavors. To falsify the results of one's research, to present the words, ideas, data, or work of another as one's own, or to cheat on an examination corrupts the essential process by which knowledge is advanced. All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Schedule of Classes published quarterly. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. If you are in doubt regarding any aspect of these issues as they pertain to this course, please consult with the instructor before you complete any relevant requirements of the course. For more information regarding academic honesty and the student conduct code at the University of Oregon, visit the University's Office of Student Life website at: http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx

3. Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with the instructor soon. It would be wise to contact Disability Services (164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155, disabsrv@uoregon.edu, http://ds.uoregon.edu/). Also please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability. [Counselor for Students with Disabilities: Molly Sirois, 346-3211, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1073, sirois@uoregon.edu