



PSYCHOLOGY 476/576: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION SPRING 2015, 101 KNIGHT LIBRARY

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Blackboard course website: Psy 476/576 (Spring 2015), Language Acquisition

REQUIRED READING:

- 1) Hoff, E. (2014). Language development. 5th 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 does it appear to be more difficult for most people 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?
- In what ways does the human language-making capacity differ from the signaling systems of other species?

FORMAT:

Grades Undergraduates taking PSY 476: Your grade in the course will be based on weekly quizzes (collectively worth 30% of your overall grade), two “review and critique” papers (each worth 20% of your overall grade), and a group-based debate project (30%). Extra-credit options are available to boost your overall grade by up to 3%. Graduate students taking (PSY 576) will have the additional requirement of identifying and evaluating two informational resources (e.g., websites, review articles, books) describing recent research findings relevant to a topic addressed in one or more lectures. Thus, for graduate students the breakdown for grading will be: weekly quizzes (25% overall), two “article review and critique” papers (each worth 20%), group-based debate project (25%), two informational resources (10%). The same extra credit options available to undergraduates (to boost your grade by up to 3%) will be available to graduate students.

The quizzes (collectively worth a total of 30% of your overall grade, 25% for graduate students in PSY576). The nine weekly quizzes will all be short answer/short essay format. The first 30 minutes of class each Wednesday (with the exception of Week 1) will be devoted to the weekly quiz. Quizzes will test your knowledge of lecture and text material. In particular, some quiz questions may require you to integrate across information covered in earlier weeks of the course (in either text and/or lecture). See the “Schedule of Topics” below for text chapter assignments for each week of the term. Everyone’s lowest quiz score will automatically be dropped before calculating your overall quiz average. If you miss a quiz and receive a zero, that quiz will automatically be the score dropped from your overall quiz average. It won’t be possible to schedule make-up quizzes, so if you anticipate missing more than one or two quizzes at the most, you should consider dropping the class. Collectively, the eight-highest-scoring-of-your-nine quizzes will account for 30% of your overall grade (25% for graduate students). Our first quiz takes place on Wednesday of Week 2, April 8, and then there will be a quiz every Wednesday thereafter. Week 10’s quiz will focus on the issues covered in the group debate powerpoint presentations (see Team-Debate Project below).

Two “Article Review and Critique” Papers: One goal of this course is to enhance your ability to both understand and evaluate research investigating fundamental issues about language acquisition. To that effect, you will write two papers that review and critique original refereed articles that are assigned (you can find them posted on our Canvas website). Each paper should be at least two double-spaced pages in length, with the following content: a) a summary of the article, b) an evaluation of both the strengths and weaknesses of the article in terms of the methodologies utilized, the findings obtained, the analytic approach, the appropriateness of the interpretation of the findings, and the significance of the research for benefitting humans and society more broadly, both in the short term and the long term. Each paper will be worth 20% of your overall grade. The first paper is due by 5 p.m., Friday of Week 3, and the second paper is due by 5 p.m., Friday of Week 6. Both papers will be submitted digitally through Canvas (details TBA).

Team-Debate Project: The goals of the group-debate project are threefold: 1) to provide an opportunity to focus on a societally important, and potentially controversial, issue concerning language acquisition that is of particular interest to you, and to engage in a dialectic with other students on the topic, 2) to communicate with the class at large about your findings in order to help build our collective knowledge base on the topic, and 3) to build your presentation skills. The team-debate project will account for 30% (25% for graduate students) of your overall grade.

To carry out the team-debate project, you will join a group of students who share an interest in a potentially controversial topic within the arena of language acquisition that has broader societal implications. As a team you will research the topic, defend a stance with respect to the topic, and produce a powerpoint that makes the best possible case for your team's stance on the topic, incorporating empirical evidence and research to bolster your case. Also important will be to articulate the potentially beneficial implications that your team's stance has for human and/or environmental well-being, as well as the betterment of society. As well, your powerpoint should include a summary slide that provides a visual "abstract", or sketch, of the whole presentation. Your team's powerpoint presentation must be posted to our course's website by 5 p.m., Friday of Week 9. The quiz on Week 10 will focus on the team-debate project issues. As well, following the quiz we will collectively consider, as a whole class, each of the debate issues to decide where we stand, as a group, on each issue. The summary slide of each team's powerpoint will be presented to the class that day as an aid to discussion.

Extra Credit: There are two extra credit options, each of which potentially enables you to improve your overall grade by as much as 3%. You may choose one or the other, but cannot get credit for both, nor for any combination of the two. Extra credit work is due latest by 5 p.m., Friday of Finals Week.

Extra Credit Option 1 (Raise Questions, Identify Gaps): You can provide commentary, on our course website, in relation to other teams' powerpoint presentations of their position on the issue that their group debates. You might raise questions regarding the case they make, propose alternatives, or even question the basis for the debate itself. Each double-spaced page's worth of debate commentary that you provide has the potential to improve your grade by as much as 1%, for a total possible improvement of 3%. Excellent, carefully articulated commentary will earn you the full amount of extra credit. You will need to print out your commentary and turn it in by Friday of Finals Week in order to receive your extra credit.

Extra Credit Option 2 (Research Participation): 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, Bill Schumacher, by email at hscoord@uoregon.edu. You can also gain additional information by going to the HSP website at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hscoord>.

Tentative Timetable of Events and Accompanying Readings

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Text Readings</u>
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	Skills for usage	Ch 7
Week 8	Language, thought, & enculturation	Ch 8
Week 9	Multiple tongues, literacy, and beyond	Ch 9 &10
Week 10	Challenge and resilience	Ch 11

Dates of Special Significance:

Every Wednesday (except Week 1)	In-class Quiz
April 17 (Week 3, Friday, 5 p.m.)	First paper Due
May 8 (Week 6, Friday, 5 p.m.)	Second paper Due
May 25 (Week 9, Monday)	Memorial Day
May 29 (Week 9, Friday, 5 p.m.)	Powerpoint Due
June 3 (Week 10, Wednesday)	Debate Resolution Day
June 12 (Finals Week, Friday, 5 p.m.)	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]