



PSYCHOLOGY 476/576: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Fall 2017, CRN: 16841

245 Straub Hall, Mon/Wed 8:30-9:20a.m.

Canvas course website: <https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/96070>

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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 one begins 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?

Course objectives and expected learning outcomes: The goals of your participation in this course include the ability to identify major theories about language development, understand a

range of significant research findings regarding mechanisms supporting acquisition of language, appreciate methodological techniques that are key to generating reproducible findings in this arena, and think critically about the implications of this body of research for societally significant issues such as education, parenting, and support for children with developmental disabilities. As well, you will gain skill in finding relevant articles regarding language development, in critically evaluating both research design and quality of evidence, as well as communicating clearly and effectively about issues fundamental to psychological functioning.

Student workload: When you complete this course, you will have earned 4 credits toward your degree. Four credits is the equivalent of 120 hours of work across the term. Along with the 3 hours spent in class each week you should plan on spending an average of 9 additional hours each week completing assignments. This will include assigned readings and articles for assignments (about 50 hours total), completing writing assignments (about 20 hours), and the team-debate project (around 20 hours).

Class meetings: A list of topics for class meetings (and corresponding assigned readings) follows. Topics for class meetings will focus directly on the issues discussed in the reading(s) assigned for that class meeting. It is imperative that you read the assigned reading prior to each class meeting so that you can both follow and participate in the discussion. There will be many opportunities for questions and comments and other contributions during lecture; the more interactive class is, the better.

Attendance: Please come to class! Class attendance is important to doing well in this course. And of course class meetings are so much more engaging for you as well as for all involved if you are here. Please come and join in our collective learning enterprise. If you anticipate missing more than two classes, please discuss it with me right away.

Required reading: There is no textbook for this course; instead, we will delve directly into the literature on language acquisition and the learning mechanisms that make language learning possible. Articles are to be read in advance of the class meetings they are assigned for. Required readings are to be found on Canvas in the Assigned Readings subfolder at the Files link.

Canvas: Canvas (<https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/96070>) will be a critical source of course-related information throughout the term. As well, powerpoint slides from lectures will be posted within a day or two after lectures have occurred. Please check the Canvas website regularly for course-related announcements, and take advantage of the communication features to communicate with your term-project team and to undertake commentary on team debate powerpoints for optional extra credit toward the end of the term.

Grades: Your grade in the course will be based on four quizzes (collectively worth 40% of your overall grade), a reaction paper (worth 30% of your overall grade; 25% for graduate students), and a group-based debate project (30%; 25% for graduate students). Extra-credit options are available to boost your overall grade by up to 3% overall. Graduate students taking the course (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 (40% overall), the reaction paper (worth 25%), the group-based debate project (25%), and two informational resources (10%). The same extra credit options available

to undergraduates (to boost your overall grade by up to 3%) will be available to graduate students. Grades will be determined based on the following breakdown of overall percentages:

97-100%= A+	83-86.99%= B	70-72.99%= C-	59.99-below= F
93-96.99%= A	80-82.99%= B-	67-69.99%= D+	
90-92.99%= A-	77-79.99%= C+	63-66.99%= D	
87-89.99%= B+	73-76.99%= C	60-62.99%= D	

Quizzes: The five every-other-week quizzes will all be mixed format (some multiple choice, short answer, short essay). The first 30 minutes of class on alternating Wednesdays (beginning Wednesday of Week 2) will be devoted to the weekly quiz. Quizzes will test your knowledge of lecture and reading material. Note that some quiz questions may require you to integrate across information covered in earlier weeks of the course (in either readings and/or lecture). You can prepare for quizzes by coming to class, spending focused time with the reading material, and engaging actively in class discussions about the reading material. See the “Schedule of Topics” below for reading assignments for each week of the term. Your lowest quiz grade will be automatically dropped from your overall grade. If you happen to miss a quiz and therefore receive a score of zero, that quiz will automatically be dropped. Makeup quizzes are difficult to accommodate. If you miss more than one quiz, it is your responsibility to make up the additional missed quiz during office hours within a week of that missed quiz. It will not be possible to make quizzes up at times outside of office hours. When a quiz is not made up within a week, you will unfortunately receive a zero for that quiz. If you anticipate missing more than one or two quizzes at the most, you should consider dropping the class. Collectively, the quizzes will account for 40% of your overall grade. Our first quiz takes place on Wednesday of Week 2, and then there will be a quiz every Wednesday thereafter.

Reaction paper: One goal of this course is to enhance your ability to both understand, evaluate, and respond to research investigating fundamental issues about language acquisition. The assigned reading list is designed with this goal in mind, as you will be reading a combination of a) theoretical papers that review whole literatures and synthesize new approaches, as well as b) empirical papers that present new data on central topics in the study of language acquisition. The reaction paper assignment gives you the opportunity to delve deeper into one of the assigned articles – whichever you choose. Your job in this paper is to summarize the core points of the paper of your choice and then to react to, critique, and expand on, those core points. This will require finding other related and/or contrasting pieces of work in the literature in order to incorporate alternative perspectives. Your reaction paper should be roughly 4-5 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, and c) discussion of alternative perspectives, more recent advances, long-standing questions, and/or future directions for investigation on the topic. The paper will be worth 30% of your overall grade (25% for graduate students) and is due by 5 p.m., Friday of Week 7 (to 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 with 2-3 other 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., Monday of Week 10.

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 Canvas 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 create a document out of your collected commentary comments, and submit this document 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 Research Participant 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 double-spaced description of the research you participated in for each of the participation credits. You can gain information by contacting the human subjects coordinator, Marcus Mayorga, by email at hscoord@uoregon.edu. You can also gain additional information by going to the HSP website at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hscoord>.

Schedule of Topics and Accompanying Readings

Week 1 Language: What is it? Who has it? How do they get it?

Monday reading: Syllabus

Wednesday Reading: Seyfarth, Cheney & Bergman, 2005, and Christiansen & Chater, 2017

Week 2 Basic biology and earlier than you might think

Monday reading: Newport, 1990

Wednesday reading: Kuhl, 2004

Week 3 Pattern mining and beyond

Monday reading: Saffran, Aslin, & Newport, 1996

Wednesday reading: Marcus, et al., 1999

Week 4 Leveling up to grammar

Monday reading: Saffran & Wilson, 2003

Wednesday reading: Gerken, et al., 2011

Week 5 Listen listen babble babble look look

Monday reading: Pettito et al., 2001 and Goldstein, et al., 2010

Wednesday reading: Yu and Smith, 2016

Week 6 The art of word learning

Monday reading: Graf Estes, et al., 2007 and Vaish, et al. 2011

Wednesday reading: Weisleder & Fernald, 2013

Week 7 Symbolic/relational thinkers and learners

Monday reading: Deloache, 2004

Wednesday reading: Gentner, 2016

Week 8 Creation and resilience

Monday reading: Goldin-Meadow, 2002

Wednesday reading: Senghas, et al, 2004

Week 9 Looking beyond the neurotypical

Monday reading: Baron Cohen, et al, 1997

Wednesday reading: Kuhl, et al., 2005

Week 10 Bilingualism has benefits

Monday reading: Bialystok, 2012

Wednesday reading: Team-debate powerpoints posted on Canvas

Dates of Special Significance:

Alternating Wednesdays (Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 10)

Week 7, Friday, 5 p.m.

Week 10, Monday, 5 p.m.

Week 10, Wednesday

Finals Week, Friday, 5 p.m.

In-class Quizzes

Reaction paper Due

Team Powerpoint Due

Debate Discussion Day

Extra Credit Due

THREE IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES

Respect/equity/inclusiveness: As is typical for any course, in this course we adhere to mutual expectations for both instructors and students regarding classroom and course-related etiquette: our goal is for engaged, open, thoughtful, informed, and respectful discussion of topics relevant to the topic of language acquisition. I ask that you be thoughtful about equity/inclusiveness and good communication in all of your course-related interactions.

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/conduct>.

Students with accessibility issues: If you have a documented disability or accessibility issue and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please let me know if there is anything I can do to help. It would be a good idea to contact the Accessible Education Center (164 Oregon Hall, 541-346-1155, email uoaec@uoregon.edu, <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>). Support through the AEC is not special treatment, but is there to help you be the best that you can be. Also, please request that the Accessible Education Center send a letter verifying that accommodations are needed.