

*The University of Western Ontario*  
**Department of Modern Languages and Literatures**  
**SP/Ling 9723**  
**First Language Acquisition**

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Winter Term: Mondays 1:30-4:30

**A. Required textbooks**

- Guasti, María Teresa (2016). *Language Acquisition. The Growth of Grammar, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. MIT Press.

**Course description:** Most people assume there is no interesting problem in the acquisition of your native tongue. To linguists, it is fascinating. Language is perhaps one of the most complex activities we engage in, and yet a child is able to acquire the basic knowledge for this activity in less than three years. How is this possible? What steps does the child go through? Using examples from different languages we will learn to think about the ‘miracle’ of acquisition, and try to understand how it is accomplished.

**Learning outcomes:** At the end of the course the student should

- understand how the problem of language and language acquisition contributes to our understanding of the human mind and how knowledge is acquired (Plato's problem).
- understand the scientific basis of language studies and thus be able to counter a number of misconceptions regarding language and language acquisition.
- understand the relation of theory to experimentation in relation to language.
- have an understanding of the course of first language acquisition, and the issues relating to it.

**Evaluation**

Participation	30%
1 empirical research paper (10-15 pages)	
outline	10%
paper	30%
oral presentations based on paper	10%
Oral presentation of article	20%

## **Organization**

*Participation:* Will be graded taking into consideration attendance, preparation for class, active and intelligent participation in discussion, and the preparation of questions related to the chapters in the textbook. Students should prepare an interesting question for each chapter. The question has to be sent by e-mail to the instructor at the latest two days before the first class for the relevant chapter.

*Empirical research paper.* The paper will be graded based on the clear formulation of the problem to be investigated, an hypothesis, a review of the literature, the methodology and the organization and form of the paper, including a bibliography correctly formatted. Data can be obtained from CHILDES.

Please consult your instructor through all the stages of your project.

*Oral Presentations.* They will be individual or carried out in pairs, depending on the number of students in the class. Clarity and comprehension of the article will be graded as will the participation of the class. You should be ready to answer questions from the undergraduate students.

Please see MLL's **academic policies**:

<http://www.uwo.ca/modlang/undergraduate/policies.html>.

## **January**

<b>8</b> Introduction to course. Guasti, chapter 1 Bohannon, J. N., & Stanowicz, L. (1988). Kuhl, P. K., & Rivera-Gaxiola, M. (2008).
<b>15</b> Phonetics and phonology. Guasti, chapter 2 Baker, S. A., Golinkoff, R. M., & Petitto, L. A. (2006). Petitto, L.-A. and P. Marentette (1991).
<b>22</b> First words. Guasti, chapter 3 Gleitman, L. (1990). Lidz, J., Gleitman, H., & Gleitman, L. R. (2003).
<b>29</b> Verbal syntax. Guasti, chapter 4 Pérez-Leroux, A. T. (1998).

## **February**

<b>5</b> Nominal syntax. Guasti, chapter 5 Brunetto, V. (2015). Grüter, T. (2005).
<b>12</b> Questions and relative clauses. Guasti, chapter 6 Gutierrez-Mangado, M. J. (2011). Hamburger, H., & Crain, S. (1982).
<b>19 Reading week</b>
<b>26</b> Passives. Guasti, chapter 7 Allen, S. E. M., & Crago, M. B. (1996).

## **March**

<b>5</b> Semantics. Guasti, chapter 8 Rooryck, J., & Vanden Wyngaerd, G. (2015).
<b>12</b> Pragmatics. Guasti, chapter 9 Grinstead, J. (2010). Huang, Y. T., & Snedeker, J. (2009).
<b>19</b> Atypical language development. Guasti, chapter 10 Paradis, J., & Crago, M. B. (2000).
<b>26</b> Early bilingualism. Guasti, chapter 11 Paradis, J. (2010).

## **April**

<b>2</b> Preparation of final papers
<b>9</b> Presentation of final papers.

## References

- Allen, S. E. M., & Crago, M. B. (1996). Early passive acquisition in Inuktitut. *Journal of Child Language*, 23(1), 129-155.
- Baker, S. A., Golinkoff, R. M., & Petitto, L. A. (2006). New insights into old puzzles from infants' categorial discrimination of soundless phonetic units. *Language Learning and Development*, 2(147-162).
- Bel, A. (2002). Early verbs and the acquisition of the tense feature in Spanish and Catalan. The Acquisition of Spanish Morphosyntax. The L1/L2 Connection. A. T. Pérez-Leroux and J. Liceras. Dordrecht, Kluwer: 1-34.
- Bohannon, J. N., & Stanowicz, L. (1988). The issue of negative evidence: adults' responses to children's language errors. *Developmental Psychology*, 24(5), 684-689.
- Brunetto, V. (2015). The pronoun interpretation problem in Romance complex predicates. *Lingua*, 161, 82-100.
- Gleitman, L. (1990). The structural sources of verb meaning. *Language Acquisition*, 1(1), 3-55.
- Grinstead, J. (2010). Linguistic interfaces and child Spanish. In L. Domínguez & P. Guijarro-Fuentes (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Romance Turn 3*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Grüter, T. (2005). Comprehension and production of French object clitics by child second language learners and children with specific language impairment. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 26(3), 363-391.
- Gutierrez-Mangado, M. J. (2011). Children's comprehension of relative clauses in an ergative language: The case of Basque. *Language Acquisition*, 18, 176-201.
- Hamburger, H., & Crain, S. (1982). Relative clause acquisition. In S. Kuczaj (Ed.), *Language Development* (Vol. I, pp. 245-274). Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Huang, Y. T., & Snedeker, J. (2009). Online interpretation of scalar quantifiers: Insight into the semantics-pragmatics interface. *Cognitive Psychology*, 58, 376-415.
- Kuhl, P. K., & Rivera-Gaxiola, M. (2008). Neural substrates of language acquisition. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 31, 511-534.
- Lidz, J., Gleitman, H., & Gleitman, L. R. (2003). Understanding how input matters: verb learning and the footprint of universal grammar. *Cognition*, 87, 151-178.
- Paradis, J. (2010). The interface between bilingual development and specific language impairment. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 31, 227-252.
- Paradis, J., & Crago, M. B. (2000). Tense and temporality: A comparison between children learning a second language and children with SLI. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43, 834-847.
- Pérez-Leroux, A. T. (1998). "The acquisition of mood selection in Spanish relative clauses." *Journal of Child Language* 25: 585-604.
- Petitto, L.-A. and P. Marentette (1991). "Babbling in the manual mode: Evidence for the ontogeny of language." *Science* 251: 1483-1496.
- Rooryck, J., & Vanden Wyngaerd, G. (2015). Morphological transparency and the Delay of Principle B Effect. *Lingua*, 155, 121-139.