

# Language Acquisition



Type of course: BA.AA.SW08 (*Aufbaumodul Linguistics*)  
Time: Thu. 12-2 p.m. (12:15 - 13:45)  
Venue: Ernst-Abbe-Platz 8, SR 401  
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 into these issues in the field of language acquisition research. Conceptually, we will focus on important developmental milestones and typical phenomena of first language acquisition, on key differences between first and second language learning, and on hotly debated questions surrounding the very nature of language learning ('Are children better language learners than adults?' 'Is there a critical time window for the acquisition process?' 'Do children work out their native language by means of innate linguistic knowledge?'). Methodologically, these questions will require us to look into an array of different methods for studying learner 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 grading system

Regular attendance and 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 grade 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*).

## Readings

The seminar discussion is based on obligatory weekly readings (see syllabus for details). It is crucial that you come to class thoroughly prepared since the readings will generally serve as an important basis for the ideas to be developed in our discussions.

*A general note on the readings:* As 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 weekly readings, 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.

## Office hours

Please take advantage of the office hours taking place every Tuesday. This is not only the place to discuss in advance the ideas for your report and term paper, but also to talk about your progress in the course and any difficulties you may experience.

# Course programme (syllabus)

DATE	CONTENTS AND OBLIGATORY LITERATURE	METHODOLOGICAL KNOW-HOW
	<b>Introduction to the study of language acquisition</b>	
1	20.10.11 <i>Goals and scope of the course. Organisation. Issues and</i>	
2	27.10.11 <i>research interests in language learning. The basic ‘puzzle’ of language acquisition and two major theoretical positions towards it.</i> <a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: 1-11 and 18-21.</a>	Ingredients of theory building in science.
	<b>Foundations of first language acquisition</b>	
3	03.11.11 <i>Developmental milestones and key phenomena in FLA.</i>	Introduction to learner corpora (CHILDES).
4	10.11.11 <a href="#">Steinberg 1993: ch.1 (3-29).</a>	Analysis of observational data.
5	17.11.11 <i>Methodological paradigms for studying FLA. Research principles and quality criteria. Publication types in linguistics and their accessibility (library, databases, etc.).</i> <a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: ch.2 (x-xx).</a>	Important basic terms and concepts of scientific research. Data collection methods. Classification of publications.
	<b>Phonological development</b>	
6	24.11.11 <i>Tuning in to the phonological structure of the native language (categorical perception, L1 commitment).</i> <a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: ch.3 (x-xx).</a>	<b>Report</b> based on <a href="#">Saxton 2010: 109-119 and Werker/Tees 1984</a>
7	01.12.11 <i>Segmentation of the speech stream into words.</i> <a href="#">Saffran et al. 1996</a> <i>Bring to class: <a href="#">Guidelines for Writing a Paper in Linguistics</a></i>	Structure of an empirical study/journal article. Operationalisation and variables. Understanding the logic of statistical testing.
	<b>Lexical development</b>	
8	08.12.11 <i>Major phenomena and findings on word learning.</i> <a href="#">Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001: ch.4 (56-79).</a>	<b>Report</b> based on <a href="#">Tomasello 2003: 82-93</a> ( <i>‘theories of word learning’</i> )
	<b>Morphosyntactic development</b>	
9	15.12.11 <i>Overview of phenomena, findings and interpretations on morphosyntactic development.</i>	<b>Assignment due</b>
10	22.12.11 <i>The nature and emergence of children’s grammar in a usage-based theory of LA.</i> <a href="#">Tomasello 2000a</a>	<b>Panels of experts</b> on <a href="#">Tomasello 2000b</a> and <a href="#">Tomasello 2002</a>
11	05.01.12 <i>A case study: The acquisition of English questions from a usage-based perspective.</i> <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>Pragmatic, discourse-related and sociolinguistic development</b>	
12	12.01.12 <i>Research findings on ‘intersentential’ competence and their explanations.</i> <a href="#">Hoff 2005: ch.6 (divided in groups)</a>	
	<b>Beyond FLA</b>	
13	19.01.12 <i>Differences between first and second language acquisition.</i>	
14	26.01.12 <i>Age effects in language learning and ‘critical periods’.</i> <a href="#">Dörnyei 2009: ch.6 (excerpt).</a>	Coping with multivariate problems, methodological plurality and conflicting theoretical interpretations.
15	02.02.12 <b>Wrap-up and outlook</b> <i>Age effects cont’d. Technicalities of the term paper. Summary and evaluation of the course.</i>	