

CMM 375
Language Acquisition

MODULE HANDBOOK

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| Module title: | Language Acquisition |
| Module Code: | CMM375 |
| CRN: | 70146 |
| Credit points: | 20 credits |

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| Module Co-ordinator: | Dr Juliana Gerard (j.gerard@ulster.ac.uk) |
| Office: | 17E07 |

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| Hours per week: | 3hr lecture/seminar |
| | Independent study, assignment preparation and directed reading (including assessment) |
| When: | Lecture and Seminar on Fridays from 13:15-16:15 |
| Where: | Lecture and Seminar in 3A08 |

Why am I studying this module?

This module will focus on specific topics in children's language acquisition, including issues in phonetics and phonology, word learning, and different syntactic phenomena. Special emphasis will be placed on becoming familiar with the kinds of questions, argumentation, and experimental designs that are used in academic journal articles on the topics in this module.

What am I going to learn on this module?

| Week | Topic | Reading |
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| 1 | Introduction, module overview | - DeLoache, Miller, & Rosengren (1997) - Meltzoff & Moore (1977) - Onishi & Baillargeon (2005) - Wynn (1992) |
| 2 | Presentation skills (Catrin) | - Guasti ch.1 (req) |
| 3 | The problem of language acquisition | - Senghas & Coppola (2001) (req) |
| 4 | Acquisition of phonology and segmentation of the speech stream | - Guasti chapter 2 and 3 selections (req) - Werker et al (1981) (req) - Kuhl, Tsao, & Liu (2003) - Saffran, Aslin, & Newport (1996) |
| 5 | Learning strategies: nature/nurture | - Lidz, Waxman, & Freedman (2003) (req) - Regier & Gahl (2004) |

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| 6 | Learning strategies: bootstrapping | - Guasti chapter 3 selections (req) - Naigles (1990) (req) |
| 7 | Careers guest lecture | |
| 8 | Bilingualism + presentations | - Bialystok (2010) (req) - Kovacs & Mehler (2009) |
| 9 | Syntactic revision 1 | - Trueswell et al. (1999) (req) - Choi & Trueswell (2010) - Ozge et al (2016) |
| 10 | Syntactic revision 2 + pronouns | - Trueswell et al. (1999) (req) - Kazanina & Phillips (2001) |
| 11 | Null subjects + presentations | - Valian (2016) (req) - Orfitelli & Hyams (2012) - Valian (1991) |
| 12 | Group project presentations | |

What should I be able to do by the end of this module?

By the end you should be able to:

- Define and discuss the Logical Problem of Language Acquisition in terms of positive evidence, (indirect) negative evidence, and the primary linguistic data
- Distinguish between arguments for the roles of the environment and of internal properties, and apply these to phenomena discussed in the module.
- Distinguish between arguments for language-specific and more general factors in language acquisition, and evaluate the evidence provided for in support of these factors for a given phenomenon.
- Recognize the key components of an academic research article, and discuss the conclusions of the article by citing the arguments made by the authors.

How am I going to learn on this module?

You have a **two hour class** during which the material will be presented by the lecturer, followed by a **weekly one hour seminar** (starting week 2) for discussing questions about assignments and reviewing course material and for presenting research articles as a group with other students in the module. Attendance and participation in both the lectures and seminars is important, and will count towards the final grade. Questions may also be posted in the online discussion board before class, and will still count towards participation.

The lecture will cover new concepts and phenomena in children's language. The seminar will focus more on experimental design, but will also provide more of an opportunity to cover any questions about new material.

How will I be assessed on this module?

- Most weeks: partial QALMRI analysis of a research article: 40% ([instructions](#))
- Group presentation of research article: 10%

- Participation/attendance during lecture/seminar: 10%
- Final project, including group presentation (experiment proposal): 40%

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| What should I read for this module? |
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Required reading:

Guasti, M. T. (2002). *Language Acquisition: The Growth of Grammar*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

[Link to ebook](#)

Bialystok, E. (2010). Bilingualism. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, n/a-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.43>

Choi, Y., & Trueswell, J. C. (2010). Children's (in)ability to recover from garden paths in a verb-final language: Evidence for developing control in sentence processing. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 106(1), 41–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2010.01.003>

DeLoache, J. S., Miller, K. F., & Rosengren, K. S. (1997). The credible shrinking room: Very young children's performance with symbolic and nonsymbolic relations. *Psychological Science*, 8(4), 308–313.

Kazanina, N., & Phillips, C. (2001). Coreference in child Russian: Distinguishing syntactic and discourse constraints. *Proceedings of the 25th Boston University Conference on Language Development*. Presented at the Boston, MA. Boston, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Kovacs, A. M., & Mehler, J. (2009). Flexible Learning of Multiple Speech Structures in Bilingual Infants. *Science*, 325(5940), 611–612. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1173947>

Kuhl, P. K., Tsao, F.-M., & Liu, H.-M. (2003). Foreign-language experience in infancy: Effects of short-term exposure and social interaction on phonetic learning. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100(15), 9096–9101.

Lidz, J., Waxman, S., & Freedman, J. (2003). What infants know about syntax but couldn't have learned: Experimental evidence for syntactic structure at 18 months. *Cognition*, 89(3), 295–303.

Meltzoff, A. N., Moore, M. K., & others. (1977). Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates. *Science*, 198(4312), 75–78.

Naigles, L. (1990). Children use syntax to learn verb meanings. *Journal of Child Language*, 17(02), 357.

Onishi, K. H., & Baillargeon, R. (2005). Do 15-Month-Old Infants Understand False Beliefs? *Science*, 308(5719), 255–258. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1107621>

- Orfitelli, R., & Hyams, N. (2012). Children's grammar of null subjects: Evidence from comprehension. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 43(4), 563–590.
- Özge, D., Kornfilt, J., Münster, K., Knoeferle, P., Küntay, A., & Snedeker, J. (2016). Predictive Use of Case Markers in German Children. *Proceedings of the 40th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*.
- Regier, T., & Gahl, S. (2004). Learning the unlearnable: The role of missing evidence. *Cognition*, 93(2), 147–155.
- Saffran, J. R., Aslin, R. N., & Newport, E. L. (1996). Statistical Learning by 8-Month-Old Infants. *SCIENCE*, 274, 13.
- Senghas, A., & Coppola, M. (2001). Children creating language: How Nicaraguan Sign Language acquired a spatial grammar. *Psychological Science*, 12(4), 323–328.
- Trueswell, J. C., Sekerina, I., Hill, N. M., & Logrip, M. L. (1999). The kindergarten-path effect: Studying on-line sentence processing in young children. *Cognition*, 73(2), 89–134.
- Valian, V. (2016). Null Subjects. *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199601264.013.17>
- Werker, J. F., Gilbert, J. H. V., Humphrey, K., & Tees, R. C. (1981). Developmental Aspects of Cross-Language Speech Perception. *Child Development*, 52(1), 349–355. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1129249>
- Wynn, K. (1992). Addition and subtraction by human infants. *Nature*, 358(6389), 749–750.

Recommended reading

- Choi, Y., & Trueswell, J. C. (2010). Children's (in)ability to recover from garden paths in a verb-final language: Evidence for developing control in sentence processing. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 106(1), 41–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2010.01.003>
- Kazanina, N., & Phillips, C. (2001). Coreference in child Russian: Distinguishing syntactic and discourse constraints. *Proceedings of the 25th Boston University Conference on Language Development*. Presented at the Boston, MA. Boston, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Kovacs, A. M., & Mehler, J. (2009). Flexible Learning of Multiple Speech Structures in Bilingual Infants. *Science*, 325(5940), 611–612. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1173947>
- Kuhl, P. K., Tsao, F.-M., & Liu, H.-M. (2003). Foreign-language experience in infancy: Effects of short-term exposure and social interaction on phonetic learning. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100(15), 9096–9101.

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- Valian, V. (2016). Null Subjects. *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199601264.013.17>