

4.41476 ~ Developmental Linguistics 2020: Course Outline

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Class meetings: See the timetable

Course description and prerequisites

This course will focus on human language development in three 'dimensions':

1. **First Language Acquisition (FLA)** – Milestones in the language development How/why children learn to speak so effortlessly in early childhood. A brief survey of the major theories of First Language Acquisition will be followed by selected readings to acquaint you with the major theoretical positions and principles.
2. **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)** – existing theories of SLA will be discussed, with selected readings
3. **Language origins** – Finally, we will discuss the ultimate questions of How/Why did we, as a species, develop the ability to 'think in words'? Why only us? This discussion will cover the latest scientific thought on the subject.

Prerequisites: 4.11406-Introduction to Linguistics,
4.211430-Linguistic Analysis;

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, you will be able to:

- describe how language development unfolds in infants and children
- explain theories of language acquisition
- discuss the extent to which language acquisition is dependent on various biological, linguistic, cognitive and environmental factors
- discuss the conflicting views on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
- explain your understanding of language origins and evolution.

Required Reading

Apart from lecture notes, you will be required to summarize a number of selected current research articles that will be sent to you by email. Major texts include:

Vygotsky, L. 1986. Thought and Language. The MIT Boston USA.

Pinker, S. 2003. The Blank Slate. Penguin Books.

Berwick, R.C. & Chomsky, N. 2016. Why Only Us. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts USA.

Assessment

Continuous: Weekly summaries (10*4=40) + participation in class discussions (10) = 50%

Final Seminar Presentation on a selected topic in one of the three course domains = 50%

Lecture schedule

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| Weeks 1-3 | Language development in children. |
| Week 4 | Major Theories of FLA |
| Weeks 5-7 | Readings (Vygotsky, Pinker, Berwick & Chomsky) |
| Week 8 | Major Theories of SLA and their implications for language education policy |
| Weeks 9-11 | Readings in SLA |
| Weeks 12-14 | Research and preparation for Final Seminar Presentation |
| Week 15 | Final Seminar Presentation |