Language Development
Psychology 6367 (CRN 19375)
Fall, 2022
Monday, 9-11:50 UGLC 338

Instructor: Christine Potter, Ph.D.
Email: cepotter2@utep.edu
Office: Psychology 109
Office Hours: by appointment (in person or by Zoom)
https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/81575350326?pwd=UFhUSTE1djl6VGlramE4aXNDL29HUT09

Course Description
Language is often described as a core part of the human experience. All human communities have rich linguistic culture, and children around the world appear to absorb language without explicit teaching, yet many adults struggle to master a language later in life. The goal of this course is to explore how children learn language and why that matters. We will consider theories and historical debates about the mechanisms underlying learning, as well as discussing recent empirical findings from the field, with a particular focus on learning in different populations and environments.

Class format
I will lecture and lead discussion for the first few weeks of this course. For the remaining meetings, class time will be roughly divided in half, and each student will be assigned one class to give a presentation. For the first 60-80 minutes, I will give a lecture designed to give some background on the methods or historical debates surrounding the topic (usually covering half of the readings for that week). Then, the presenting student will take over (see below for details) for around 80 minutes. For some classes, I will use the last 15-20 minutes to provide a quick preview of the topic for the next week’s class when I think it is helpful to have context before doing the reading.

Course materials
All materials will be made available on Blackboard. Note that for some weeks, there are optional readings, or you have a choice about which papers to read.

Requirements
Lead one discussion. Your responsibility is to do an effective job in presenting the readings and related material and engaging the class in thoughtful, informed discussion. The assigned readings will serve as a starting point to spark discussion. However, the presentations should extend beyond just beyond 1-2 papers that the whole class has already read. For example, studies do not occur in isolation- what theory/research did the assigned paper follow? Have there been other studies that replicated/challenged/extended these findings? An effective presentation will require a decent amount of background reading, as well as some time spent on synthesizing facts and ideas. Because a lot of these material is likely to be new to you, you’ll meet with ~2 weeks prior to your presentation to discuss the literature that you’ve flagged as potentially relevant, and we can go over other things that you might have missed, as well as the structure of your presentation.
and ideas for bringing in other materials. Remember that the goal of the presentation should be to generate discussion and a deeper understanding of the topic of the day.

**Attendance and participation.** When you are not the presenter, your assignment is to prepare in advance to contribute to the discussion and then participate actively. There should be plenty to talk about. I realize that some people are more comfortable speaking in groups than others and that there will be variability in how much individual people talk. However, with a small group, there should be opportunities for everyone to contribute and to demonstrate that they have reflected on the readings and issues and bring their own unique understanding. To facilitate discussion, everyone must submit at least 2-3 *discussion questions* about that week’s reading prior to class that the presenter can use to guide the conversation. Posts must be made by Friday at 5pm every week, beginning in Week 4 (except for the week where you are the presenter). If for some reason you are unable to attend class, these posts are how you can still contribute to the conversation. Please notify me in advance if you will need to miss class for an excused reason (e.g., religious holidays, family emergencies, illness, professional commitments such as conferences).

**Writing.** I want you to have a variety of opportunities to practice your writing, so you will be asked to complete multiple short writing assignments, rather than a single term paper. You have a lot of flexibility on when you complete these assignments, so please be mindful of your own scheduled and spread them out over the semester.

*Reflection papers* (2). These papers are intended to allow you to reflect on readings that you found especially engaging, controversial, or relevant to your own research interests on weeks when you are not responsible for leading the discussion. They can be an endorsement of the paper’s central claims, critiques of the authors’ methodological approach, integration of the research with theoretical ideas not mentioned in the paper, etc. Reflection papers should be ~2 pages long and are due prior to class where we discuss that paper (and should not be for the same week that you are leading discussion).

*Commentary paper.* Your main paper will follow the format of a ‘dispatch’ (guidelines posted), which is a short-form paper that aims to draw attention to key points in a recently published experimental paper and helps place the paper in a broader context for non-experts. You can choose any paper that relates to language development, regardless of whether it is a topic that we discussed. You may turn in a draft of the paper *(by email)* AT ANY POINT during the semester. I’ll grade it, and you can choose whether to submit that version or if you’re not happy with the grade, you can make changes that I suggest and resubmit for a higher grade until you are satisfied. I will return papers within one week, and the final paper must be submitted by December 1.

**Grading**
- Presentation/leading discussion: 40%
- Attendance and participation: 25%
- Reflection papers: 10%
- Commentary: 25%
**Academic Integrity**
I hope this goes without saying, but academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Your work should be your own, and if you are using another author’s ideas, you should provide citations in your papers and posts. If I suspect any type of plagiarism, I am required to report the case immediately, with no exceptions.

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit **HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline**.

**Accommodations Policy**
The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the **UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS)**. Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, or email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the **CASS portal**.

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at (915) 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/. If you choose, I also encourage you to reach out to me if there are ways that I can support you and help you take advantage of the resources and accommodations.

**Course Schedule**
Every attempt will be made to follow the guidelines and plans in this syllabus as much as possible. However, I reserve the right to make changes (e.g., the schedule of topics) if needed. I recommend reading papers in the order that they are presented below; often, earlier papers or reviews provide context for later studies.
WEEK 1, August 22: Organization, central issues in the study of language


Additional readings:

WEEK 2, August 29: Intro to language science & studying infants

- Pick at least one from the following:
  - Testing what infants know
  - Artificial language experiments
  - Parental language report
  - Naturalistic observation
  - Neuroscience
  - Computational modeling

WEEK 3, September 5  NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

WEEK 4, September 12: Infant-directed communication

*Infant preferences*
Caregiver behavior


WEEK 5, September 19: Input & Interaction

**Capturing early experience**


**Influences of parent behavior**


WEEK 6, September 26: Learning the sounds of language (Kiran)


**Statistical learning**


WEEK 7, October 3: Early word learning (Liam)

**What do words refer to?**


**Understanding & learning words**


**WEEK 8, October 10: Combining words and learning grammar (Ethan)**

**Early grammar knowledge**

**WEEK 9, October 17: Age effects and the Critical Period Hypothesis (Sarah)**

**Age-related changes**

**WEEK 10, October 24: Learning multiple languages (Rebeca)**

**Early bilingual development**

**Consequences of bilingual experience**
WEEK 11, October 31: Balance and dominance in bilingual environments (Diana)

Bilingual input

Processing two languages

WEEK 12, November 7: Language development in special populations (Josh)

Late talkers and language-specific delays

Skills and challenges in other populations

WEEK 13, November 14: Language and socioeconomic status (Erin)


Language interventions
WEEK 14, November 21: Language & education

Vocabulary and school readiness

Language variation & schooling

WEEK 15, November 28: Heritage language learning & loss (Andy)

Majority & minority language development