LING 607 Topics in Psycholinguistics

Acquisition of Variation
Spring 2025
Tuesdays, 12-2:59 pm in Walnut 313C

Professor

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- Office: Walnut 314C (next to classroom)

Course description

In this seminar, we'll read papers and discuss children's acquisition of variation. We'll focus specifically on what we know about how children acquire variation and what factors lead children to change variation rather than acquire it (e.g. regularization). Topics will include acquisition of sociolinguistic variation, age of acquisition of particular variables, whether/when children use language as an social index, children's acquisition of pidgin and creole languages, children acquiring language from non-native speakers (e.g. deaf children born to hearing parents or late-learning signers), and more.

Materials

1. Canvas site
2. Google drive folder (another way to view the materials posted to canvas)
3. Google group email listserv: ling6700@googlegroups.com

Grading

1. *Participation and preparation (35%):* Each week, please prepare for the discussion by reading the 2-3 assigned papers and sharing a few questions/comments on Canvas Discussions. You are also responsible for participating in the class discussion.
2. *Discussion leader (25%)*: Several times throughout the semester (but not every week), you will serve as discussion leader. You'll be responsible for presenting the paper, including summarizing (motivation, research questions, approach, and findings) and leading a discussion of the work
3. *Research proposal (40%)*: You will select a topic of interest (within the bounds of acquisition of variation) and write a research project proposal. There will be several assignments leading up to this final paper to help you make progress, including peer feedback.

Late work and missed class
- *Reading comments* are your preparation for the discussion, so they are due by the beginning of class each week. Late reading comments can be submitted for 50% credit.
- *Missing class.* Attendance is important, but your health comes first. Please stay home and rest if you are feeling sick; you can miss a few classes without affecting your grade. **There is no Zoom option.**
- *Proposal checkpoints* are also due at the beginning of class. You may request an extension of up to 6 days for any reason. Work received more than 6 days late will receive 50% credit.

Schedule

Wk	Date	Topic	Assignment due (by class)
1	Jan 21	**No class** Read syllabus & seminar instructions	Reading comments
2	Jan 28	Developmental sociolinguistics	Reading comments
3	Feb 4	Acquiring pidgin & creole languages	Reading comments
4	Feb 11	Emerging sign languages	Reading comments
5	Feb 18	Regularization of inconsistent input	Reading comments
6	Feb 25	Acquisition of constraints on variation	Reading comments **Specific aims due**
7	Mar 4	*Specific aims feedback*	
8	Mar 11	**No class, spring break**	
9	Mar 18	Acquisition of variable plural	Reading comments
10	Mar 25	Acquisition of third person singular -s	Reading comments **Revised specific aims due**
11	Apr 1	**TBD**	
12	Apr 8	Sex and SES differences in variable use	Reading comments
13	Apr 15	Acquisition of variation in the lab	Reading comments **Proposal due**
14	Apr 22	*Mock study section 1*	
15	Apr 29	*Mock study section 2*	**Revised proposal due**

16	May 6	**No class, finals week**	

Readings
Assigned readings are marked with an asterisk (~3 per week). The rest are optional.

- **Jan 21: No class**
    1. *Syllabus (this document)
    2. *[Seminar instructions](#)
- **Jan 28: Developmental sociolinguistics**
    1. *Johanna S. DeStefano (1971) [Developmental Sociolinguistics: Child Language in a Social Setting](#), WORD, 27:1-3, 485-494
    2. *Johnson, E. K., & White, K. S. (2020). [Developmental sociolinguistics: Children's acquisition of language variation.](#) Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science, 11(1), e1515.
    3. *Shin & Miller (2022) Children's acquisition of morphosyntactic variation. Language Learning and Development 18(2), 125-150.
- **Feb 4: Acquiring pidgin & creole languages**
    1. *Sankoff, G. (2019) [Transmission Revisited](#). In David Lightfoot & J. Havenhill, (eds.), Variable properties in language: Their nature and acquisition, pp 155-166. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
    2. *Sankoff, G., & Laberge, S. (1980) "[On the Acquisition of Native Speakers by a Language](#)". In The Social Life of Language. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
    3. *Sankoff, G. (1979) [The genesis of a language](#). In K.C. Hill (Ed.), The Genesis of Language. Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers.
    4. Romaine, S. (1988) [Pidgin and creole linguistics.](#) London: Longman, 23-46.
    5. Slobin, D. (1977) [Language change in childhood and history](#). In J. Macnamara (Ed.), Language Learning and Thought. New York: Academic Press.
    6. Bickerton, D. (1984) [The language bioprogram hypothesis, plus commentaries and author's response.](#) The Behavioral and Brain Sciences. 7, 173-221.
    7. Bakker, P., Daval-Markussen, A., Parkvall, M., & Plag, I. (2011) [Creoles are typologically distinct from non-creoles.](#) Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages. 26, 5–42.

- **Feb 11: Emerging sign languages**
  1. *Senghas, A., & Coppola, M. (2001). [Children creating language: How Nicaraguan Sign Language acquired a spatial grammar](). Psychological science, 12(4), 323-328.
  2. *Senghas, A. (2005). Language emergence: Clues from a new Bedouin sign language. Current Biology, 15:12, 463-465.
  3. *Senghas, A. (2019). [How Language Learns: Linking Universals to Acquisition.]()
  4. Brentari, D., Coppola, M., Cho, P. W., & Senghas, A. (2017). [Handshape complexity as a precursor to phonology: variation, emergence, and acquisition](). Language Acquisition, 24(4), 283-306.
  5. Gleitman, L., Senghas, A., Flaherty, M., Coppola, M., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (2019). [The emergence of the formal category "symmetry" in a new sign language.]() Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 116(24), 11705-11711.
  6. Supalla, T. & Webb, R. [The grammar of International Sign: A new look at pidgin languages.]() In K. Emmorey & J. Reilly (Eds.), Language, gesture, and space. Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum, 1995.
  7. Osugi, Y. , Supalla, T., & Webb, R. [The use of word elicitation to identify distinctive gestural systems on Amami Island](). Sign Language and Linguistics, 1999, 2, 87-112.
  8. Senghas, A., Coppola, M., Newport, E.L., & Supalla, T. [Argument structure in Nicaraguan Sign Language: The emergence of grammatical devices.]() In E. Hughes, M. Hughes, & A. Greenhill (eds.), Proceedings of the 21st Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development: Vol.2. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 1997.
  9. Sandler, W., Meir, I., Padden, C. & Aronoff, M. [The emergence of grammar: Systematic structure in a new language](). PNAS, 2005, 102, 2661-2665.
- **Feb 18: Regularization of inconsistent input**
  1. Newport, E. L. (1999). [Reduced input in the acquisition of signed languages; Contributions to the study of creolization.]()
  2. *Singleton, J. L., & Newport, E. L. (2004). [When learners surpass their models: The acquisition of American Sign Language from inconsistent input.]() Cognitive Psychology, 49(4), 370–407.
  3. *Hudson Kam, C. L., & Newport, E. L. (2005). [Regularizing unpredictable variation: The roles of adult and child learners in language formation and change.]() Language Learning and Development: The Official Journal of the Society for Language Development, 1(2), 151–195.

4. Hudson Kam, C. L., & Newport, E. L. (2009). Getting it right by getting it wrong: When learners change languages. Cognitive Psychology, 59(1), 30–66.
5. *Austin, A., Schuler, K.D., Furlong, S., & Newport, E.L. (2022) Learning a language from inconsistent input: Regularization in child and adult learners
6. Ross, D. S., & Newport, E. L. (1996). The development of language from non-native linguistic input. Proceedings of the 20th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, 2, 634–645.

- **Feb 25: Acquisition of constraints on variation**
    1. *Smith & Holmes-Elliott (under review) Where do the stops start? Transmission and Incrementation in the Childhood Years.
    2. *Smith, J., Durham, M., & Fortune, L. (2007). "Mam, ma troosers is fa'in doon!" Community, caregiver and child in the acquisition of variation in Scottish dialect. Language Variation and Change, 19(1), 63–99.
    3. *Smith, J., Durham, M., & Richards, H. (2013). The social and linguistic in the acquisition of sociolinguistic norms: caregivers, children, and variation. Linguistics and Philosophy, 51(2), 285–324.
    4. Smith, J., Durham, M., & Fortune, L. (2009). Universal and dialect-specific pathways of acquisition: Caregivers, children, and t/d deletion. Language Variation and Change, 21(1), 69–95.
    5. Labov, W. (1989). The child as linguistic historian. Language Variation and Change, 1(01), 85–97.
    6. Roberts, J. (1997). Acquisition of variable rules: a study of (-t, d) deletion in preschool children. In Journal of Child Language (Vol. 24, Issue 2, pp. 351–372).
    7. Roberts, J. L. (1994). Acquisition of Variable Rules: (-t,d) Deletion and (ing) Production in Preschool Children.
    8. Shin, N. L. (2016). Acquiring constraints on morphosyntactic variation: children's Spanish subject pronoun expression. Journal of Child Language, 43(4), 914–947.
- **Mar 4: Specific aims feedback**
- **Mar 11: No class, spring break**
- **Mar 18: Acquisition of variable plural**
    1. *Miller, K. & Cárdenas, R. (2020) Stylistic Patterns in the Speech of Young Children and Their Caregivers: A Study of Variable /s/ Lenition in Dominican Spanish. In: An Anthology of Bilingual Child Phonology, by Elena Babatsouli and Martin J. Ball (eds.), Multilingual Matters
    2. *Lukyanenko, C. & Miller, K. (2019) Learning the plural from variable input: An eye-tracking study of Chilean children's plural comprehension. Journal of Monolingual and Bilingual Speech 1 (2), 248-279.

3. *Miller, K. (2013) [Acquisition of variable rules: /s/-lenition in the speech of Chilean Spanish- speaking children and their caregivers.](#) Language Variation and Change 25, 311-340.
4. Miller, K. & Schmitt, C. (2012) [Variable input and the acquisition of plural morphology.](#) Language Acquisition: A Journal of Developmental Linguistics, 19, (3), 223-261.

- **Mar 25: Acquisition of third person singular -s**
  1. *Green, Lisa J., "[Syntactic Variation](#)" (2007). Sociolinguistic Variation: Theories, Methods, and Applications. 184.
  2. *Newkirk-Turner & Green (2016) [Third person singular -s and event marking in child African American English](#)
  3. *Cleveland, Lesli H. & Oetting, Janna B. (2013) [Children's marking of verbal -s by nonmainstream English dialect and clinical status](#). American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology 22. 604-614
  4. *de Villiers and Johnson (2007) [The information in third person /s/: Acquisition across dialects of American English.](#) Journal of Child lnauage 34. 133-158.
  5. Kovac & Adamson (1981) Variation theory and first language acquisition. In David Sankoff & Henrietta Cedergren (eds), Variation Omnibus: Current Inquiry into Language and Linguistics, 403-410. Edmonton, Canada: Linguistics Research, Inc.
  6. Green, Lisa J. (2011) Language and the African American child. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press
  7. van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010) Coming of age in African American English: A longitudinal study. Journal of Sociolinguistics 14. 427-455.
  8. Green, Lisa J. (2002) African American English: A linguistic introduction. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press
- **Apr 1: TBD**
- **Apr 8: Sex and SES differences in variable use**
  1. *Habib, R. (2017). [Parents and their children's variable language: Is it acquisition or more?](#) Journal of Child Language, 44(3), 628–649.
  2. *Foulkes, P., Docherty, G. J., & Watt, D. (2005). [Phonological Variation in Child-Directed Speech.](#) Language, 81(1), 177–206.
  3. *Chevrot, J. P., Nardy, A., & Barbu, S. (2011). [Developmental dynamics of SES-related differences in children's production of obligatory and variable phonological alternations](#). Language Sciences
  4. *Barbu, S., Nardy, A., Chevrot, J.-P., & Juhel, J. (2013). [Language evaluation and use during early childhood: Adhesion to social norms or integration of environmental regularities?](#) Linguistics and Philosophy, 51(2), 381–411.

5. Díaz-Campos, M. (2005). The emergence of adult-like command of sociolinguistic variables: a study of consonant weakening in Spanish-speaking children.
- **Apr 15: Acquisition of variation in the lab**
    1. *Wonnacott, E. & Brown, H. & Nation, K. (2017). [Skewing the evidence: The effect of input structure on child and adult learning of lexically based patterns in an artificial language.](#) Journal of Memory and Language, 95, 36-48.
    2. *Samara, A., Smith, K., Brown, H., & Wonnacott, E. (2017). [Acquiring variation in an artificial language: Children and adults are sensitive to socially conditioned linguistic variation](#). Cognitive Psychology, 94, 85–114.
    3. *Hendricks, A. E., Miller, K., & Jackson, C. N. (2018). [Regularizing Unpredictable Variation: Evidence from a Natural Language Setting.](#) Language Learning and Development: The Official Journal of the Society for Language Development, 14(1), 42–60.
    4. Hudson Kam, C. L., & Chang, A. (2009). [Investigating the cause of regularization in adults: Memory constraints or learning differences?](#) JEP: Learning, Memory, and Cognition, 35, 815-821.
    5. *Hudson Kam, C. L. (2015). [The impact of conditioning variables on the acquisition of variation in adult and child learners.](#) Language, 91(4), 906–937.
- **Apr 22: Mock study section 1**
- **Apr 29: Mock study section 2**
- **May 6: No class, finals week**