Syllabus for Linguistics 524
Seminar: Phonological Acquisition

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1 Description

This is a research seminar. Its purpose is to stimulate and facilitate research by giving participants a place to (1) read about current debates which might connect with their research interests, and (2) discuss their own research projects with other researchers with similar interests.

LING 524 is aimed especially at those who are working on sound-related MA or PhD projects, and at those who are searching for an MA or PhD project. Others are welcome too.

The prerequisite for grads is LING 523, Phonology I. People who have taken LING 524 before may be able to take it again under 415. Email me.

2 Themes

Our subject is the acquisition of phonology, especially first-language phonology, and how it is connected to issues elsewhere. Recurrent themes include:

Data-driven learning and analytic bias: Learning requires both a learner and a body of experience to learn from. The learner does not treat all experience equally; some patterns in the adult language are learned faster or better than others, and children acquire patterns which appear to be supported by no evidence in the adult language. What properties must learners have in order to respond to experience in the way they are observed to do? What is the source of children’s innovations?
Continuity: How different, qualitatively, is adult phonology from child phonology? Is it true (as some have proposed) that every child phonology is a possible adult phonology? If not, what is the cause of the disparity?

Child language and language change: What is the role of language learners in sound change? Are children’s innovations a source of new phonological rules in the adult language?

The phonetics-phonology interface: How are continuous and discrete representations converted into each other? Are lexical items represented in terms of how they sound, or of how they are articulated? Do production and perception affect each other, and, if so, how?

These are big questions, which touch on multiple areas of linguistics and even go well beyond linguistics. There is no shortage of interesting work to be done here!

3 Requirements

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

1. Participation in class discussion: 10%
2. Reading reactions: 10%
3. Leading discussion for 3 articles: 30%
4. Term project:
   (a) Proposal: 5%
   (b) Rough draft: 15%
   (c) Peer review: 5%
   (d) Class presentation: 10%
   (e) Final draft: 15%

Particulars:

1. Participation in class discussion. Seminar discussion is supposed to be lively! Everyone is expected to come to class having read and thought about the assigned reading, and to contribute to the class discussion of the reading, its implications, and its connections to the rest of phonology.

2. Reading reactions. We will normally read two papers per week. By 10 a.m. on the day of class, you need to send me a paragraph or two reacting to some aspect of the reading.
Plain text email is best; if you need to attach something, please use .pdf. Here are some things you can talk about in a reading reaction:

—Disagree with the author on some point, and explain why.
—Agree with the author, and add a new argument in favor of some point.
—Point out a connection between the paper and something else you know about.

The reading reactions should show that you have thought about the article (otherwise they won’t get credit). In particular, please don’t submit a reading reaction that says nothing more than “I didn’t understand this reading”. It’s legitimate to criticize an author for being unclear, and it’s okay to use your reading reaction to let me know what part of the reading gave you trouble. But you should at least explain where and why your understanding of the reading broke down, or comment on some part of the paper that you did understand.

I will anonymize the reactions and distribute them to the class. You should also cc the days discussion leader, if it isn’t me.

3. **Leading class discussion.** Each student will be responsible for leading class discussion on 3 of the assigned articles. The leader doesn’t necessarily have to present the article formally to the class as a lecture, but should take charge of organizing the discussion, and come prepared with a set of topics or questions for the class to discuss, formulated as a handout on paper.

Everyone has to be discussion leader three times, once in September, once in October, and once after then.

4. **Term project.** I’ll give out more information later, but here’s the basic outline:

October 5: A short project proposal is due. What phenomenon are you interested in, and how do you plan to get at it? It should include a list of references. We’ll meet individually to discuss them before Fall Break.

Mid-November: A first draft is due. You’ll get comments on this draft from me, and from one of your classmates. You’ll also give comments on someone else’s draft.

Last week of classes: In-class presentation of your project.

The final version of the paper is due on Wednesday, December 12.

Projects can involve observation, experiments, analysis of published data, theoretical innovation, modelling and simulation, etc. However, they must do something new – new data, new theory, new way of testing an existing hypothesis, etc. A literature review is not enough! The seminar is there to help achieve such projects. Its okay (in fact, its a good thing) if your project is also part of your MA thesis or dissertation.
If your project involves getting speech or behavioral data from children or adults, you will need to get it approved by the Behavioral IRB. In order to do this, you need to have completed the on-line human-subjects training. If you were in Ling 520 last fall, you've already done that. Otherwise, you need to set aside about 6 hours for it.

4 Schedule

With such a small class, we have a lot of freedom in scheduling our meeting time. I would like to arrange it so that we meet "seminar style", i.e., once a week for a double session. The official schedule calls for 29 hour-and-a-quarter meetings, but we can collapse this into one hour-and-a-quarter meeting (today’s) and 14 two-and-a-half-hour meetings.

Most of the readings are up on Blackboard in machine-readable format \(^1\). A few aren’t: Drachman (1978); Gnanadesikan (2004); Goad (2001); Werker & Tees (1984). You can get them from the library, or xerox my copy.

\(^1\)http://blackboard.unc.edu/; go to Ling 524 and look in the "Course Documents" folder
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Case study: syllable structure.</td>
<td>Levelt et al. (1999); Levelt &amp; van de Vijver (2004)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9/17, 9/19</td>
<td>Case study: word prosody.</td>
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<td>Consonant harmony. Project proposals due.</td>
<td>Goad (2001); Pater &amp; Werle (2003)</td>
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<td>10/8, 10/10</td>
<td>Development of phonetic discrimination. Meet to discuss project proposals</td>
<td>Werker &amp; Tees (1984); Maye et al. (2002)</td>
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<td>10/15, 10/17</td>
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<td>Phonotactic knowledge in infants.</td>
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References


