The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
First Term of 2026-27

Course code and title

LING3201 First Language Acquisition 第一語言獲得

Instructor and Teaching Assistant

Instructor: Prof. Virginia Yip

Teaching Assistant: Ellie Bultena (PhD student)

Lecture time and venue

Tuesday 9:30am-11:15am; Room 104, YC Liang Hall (LHC)

Tutorial time and venue

Tuesday 11:30am-12:15pm; Room 104, YC Liang Hall (LHC)

Course overview

This course provides a general introduction to issues and findings in first language acquisition. How do children acquire a first language in early childhood? Why is children's acquisition of a first language considered an amazing achievement? Can children acquire more than one first language? We will explore the multiple factors that shape children's language acquisition and their input conditions in diverse contexts will be discussed. We will discuss children's developmental stages with special reference to the acquisition of Cantonese as a first language. The course will also look at language acquisition in heritage children in overseas communities in comparison with children in the homeland.

Learning outcomes

Students are expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

(a) Appreciation of how children acquire their first language(s) and the complexity involved in the learning task.
(b) Understanding of the key concepts and the developmental milestones in children's acquisition of core components of their first language.
(c) Basic grasp of the naturalistic and experimental methods used in the study of child language.
(d) Ability to address specific issues of child language development through describing and analyzing language data in the CHILDES databases.

List of topics

Topics	Contents/fundamental concepts
Introduction to language acquisition	■ Nature of language acquisition; universal features of how children acquire language
Corpus based methods	■ CHILDES commands and child language databases
Lexical development	The Gavagai problem; lexical/vocabulary spurt; innate biases for learning the meanings of words; overextension and underextension
Grammatical development: Morphology and syntax	■ The acquisition of regular morphological rules; knowledge of the constraints on word formation; overregularization ■ Stages of language development; acquisition of grammatical constructions
Phonetic and phonological development	■ Infant speech perception and vocalization; word segmentation; phonological features in child language
Acquisition of Chinese	■ Some features of the acquisition of Cantonese as a first language and Chinese as a heritage language
Nativist approach to language acquisition	■ Universal Grammar; Principles and Parameters; innate knowledge of language; Poverty of Stimulus Argument
Usage-based approach to language acquisition	■ Input driven incremental learning, item-based constructions

Learning activities

Lecture		Interactive tutorial		Assigned readings		Writing assignments		Web discussions		Quiz & Exam		Research report	
(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class		(hr) in | out class	
26	0	12	0	0	30	0	20	0	3	2	0	6	30
M	NA	M	NA	NA	M & O	NA	M	NA	O	M	NA	M	M

M: Mandatory activity in the course / O: Optional activity / NA: Not applicable

Assessment scheme

Tasks	Weight
Final Exam	30%
Term Project (Individual or group projects)	40%
Tutorial participation and in-class contributions	30%

Make-up/Late submission policy

Assessment tasks	Extension allowed (Y/N)	Make-up/Late submission policy
Final exam	N	No make-up exam will be given. Zero marks will be given if a student does not take the exam on the scheduled date.
Term project	Y	Approval must be sought by submitting a formal request for late submission accompanied by supporting documents at least 5 working days before the original deadline. Late submissions will receive a grade reduction of 10% for each day overdue.

University Policy on sharing lecture recordings

The university's policy on sharing lecture recordings is adopted for this course: The copyright of any lecture recordings shared in the course, whether they are produced by the teachers, students, or peer note-takers, belongs to the University.

Students should not share these recordings with others without obtaining prior written consent from the teachers.

Grade descriptors for assessment

Grade	Overall course
A	The student shows outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. Originality of term paper and the ability to address some issues in language acquisition is expected.
A-	The student shows excellent performance on all learning outcomes. Work displays an extensive knowledge of the relevant topics, and an ability to make valid arguments.
B	The student shows very good performance on most of the learning outcomes. Work is interesting and purposeful.

C The student shows good performance on most of the learning outcomes. Work is good in some parts, but sometimes shows incomplete or inadequate understanding of the topics.

D The student shows limited grasp of basic material, lacking understanding of the basic issues. Work shows considerable weakness in understanding the relevant materials.

F The student shows inability to achieve most of the learning outcomes, lacking understanding and participation in lectures and tutorials. The work is likely to show major misunderstanding and confusion.

Recommended learning resources

A. Key textbook

Hoff, Erika. 2013. *Language Development*. Fifth ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .H64 2014]

B. Recommended books

Becker, Misha, and Kamil Deen. 2020. *Language Acquisition and Development: A Generative Introduction*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .B423 2020]

O'Grady, William. 2005. *How Children Learn Language*.
eBook Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press. [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .O268 2005]

C. Other recommended texts on first and second language acquisition

Clark, Eve. 2016. *First Language Acquisition*. Third ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .C547 2016]

De Houwer, Annick. 2009. *Bilingual First Language Acquisition*. UK: Multilingual Matters.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .D373 2009]

Paradis, Johanne, Fred Genesee, and Martha B. Crago. 2021. *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*. Third ed. Baltimore; London; Sydney: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P115.2 .G458 2021]

Yip, Virginia, and Stephen Matthews. 2007. *The Bilingual Child: Early Development and Language Contact*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P115.2 .Y55 2007]

D. Handbooks on language and language acquisition

Bavin, Edith Laura, and Letitia R. Naigles. 2015. *The Cambridge Handbook of Child Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .C36 2015]

Lidz, Jeffrey, William Snyder, and Joe Pater. 2016. *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .O84 2016]

E. References on methods in language acquisition research

Blom, Elma, and Sharon Unsworth. 2010. *Experimental Methods in Language Acquisition Research*. Philadelphia; Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118 .E87 2010]

Hoff, Erika, ed. 2012. *Research Methods in Child Language: A Practical Guide*. Malden, MA; Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

eBook [Hardcopy on UL reserve: P118.3 .R47 2012]

F. Journals on language acquisition

Journal of Child Language
First Language
Language Acquisition
Bilingualism, Language and Cognition
International Journal of Bilingualism
Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism

G. Corpora on child language

Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES)

https://childes.talkbank.org

The Hong Kong Cantonese Child Language Corpus (CANCORP)

http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~lal/corpora.html#CANCORP

Hong Kong Bilingual Child Language Corpus

A Multimedia Child Mandarin Corpus: the Tong Corpus

Bilingual Child Heritage Chinese Corpus

Feedback for evaluation

A mid-term course evaluation and an end-of-term course evaluation will be conducted. Students are welcome to give feedback to the course teacher at any time in person or through emails.

Course schedule

Class/ week	Topic
Week 1 8 September & Week 2 15 September	Introduction to language acquisition: how do children acquire language? Hoff, E. 2013. Ch1. Introduction to the Study of Language Development pp.3-28. Corpus-based methods: CHILDES Workshop Wong, A.M., T. Klee, S.F. Stokes, P. Fletcher and L.B. Leonard. 2010. Differentiating Cantonese-speaking preschool children with and without SLI using MLU and lexical diversity (D). Journal of Speech Language Hearing Research 53(3):794-9. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0195). PMID: 20530389; PMCID: PMC7251334. Yip, V. & S. Matthews. 2007. Chapter 3 methodology
Week 3 22 September	Approaches to language acquisition: Nature and Nurture Hoff, E. 2013. Ch1. Introduction to the Study of Language Development pp.15-28. Tomasello, M. 2015. "The Usage-based Theory of Language Acquisition." In The Cambridge Handbook of Child Language, eds. Edith Laura Bavin and Letitia R. Naigles, 89-106. Second ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Week 4 29 September	Bilingual first language acquisition: how children acquire two first languages Hoff, E., et al. 2014. Properties of dual language input that shape bilingual development and properties of environments that shape dual language input. In Gruter, T, and J. Paradis (eds.) *Input and Experience in Bilingual Development* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp.119-140. Paradis, J., F. Genesee and M.Crago. 2011. Ch 4. Language development in simultaneous bilingual children. In Paradis, Genesee and Crago. Yip, V. 2013. Simultaneous language acquisition. In F. Grosjean and P. Li. (eds).*The Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism*, Wiley-Blackwell, 119-136.
Week 5 6 October	Lexical development Hoff, E. 2013. Ch. 5 Lexical development: learning words.
Week 6 13 October	Grammatical development Yang, J., J. F. Lawrence and V. Grøver. 2024. What else will I do when I start school? Preschoolers' wh-questions in dinnertime conversations and their

	language development. *First Language* 44.3. 301-323. https://doi.org/10.1177/01427237241242177 Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Ch4. To move or not to move?
Week 7 20 October	Phonological development Hoff, E. 2013. Ch4. Phonological Development: Learning the Sounds of Language pp.109-132.
Week 8 27 October	Acquisition of Chinese Wong, A. 2022. The development of grammar in Cantonese-speaking preschool children. In Understanding Development and Disorder in Cantonese using Language Sample analysis, pp.65-102. London: Routledge. Zhou, J., V. Yip & S. Matthews. 2026. Ch 30. Bilingual acquisition of Cantonese. In Andy Chin, Shin Kataoka, Bit-Chee Kwok (eds). Routledge Handbook of Cantonese Linguistics. Routledge.
Week 9 3 November	Acquisition of Chinese in heritage speakers Li, A. & S. Matthews, S. 2022. Turning the tide: reversing heritage language attrition and shift in a Chinese American family. To appear in *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*. Montrul, S. 2013. Bilingualism and the heritage language speaker, in Bhatia & Ritchie (eds.), pp. 168-189. Zhang, D. 2010. Language maintenance and language shift among Chinese immigrant parents and their second-generation children in the U.S. *Bilingual Research Journal* 33.1. 42-60. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235881003733258
Week 10 10 November	Language and cognitive development Clyne, M. 1997. Retracing the first seven years of bilingual and metalinguistic development through the comments of a bilingual child. In S. Eliasson and E.H. Jahr (eds.), *Language and its ecology. Studies in memory of Einar Haugen*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 235-259. Baker, C. 2001. Ch.7 Bilingualism and cognition, pp.134-161. Bialystok & Barac. 2013. Cognitive effects, in Grosjean & Li (2013) (eds.), pp. 192-213
Week 11 17 November	Development of pragmatics: use of language in contexts Hoff, E. 2013. Ch.7 Communicative Development: Learning to Use Language pp.205-234.
Week 12 24 November	Course review and term projects
Week 13 1 December	**Exam (no makeup exam)** Make sure you take the exam in person or you will receive ZERO marks.
11 December 2026 5pm	**Term project due date**

Teacher and TA's contact details

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:	Professor
Name:	Virginia Yip
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Teaching Assistants:	
Name:	Ellie Bultena & ZHANG Fan
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- **Facility for posting course announcements**

All announcements for the course will be posted on Blackboard.

- **Academic honesty and plagiarism**

"Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/ With each assignment, students will be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures."

For each written assignment, students are required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign on the declaration.

For assignments/papers in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Details of course website

LING 3201 on Blackboard: https://blackboard.cuhk.edu.hk/

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.

- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.

- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/ teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/ share/ copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/ teachers concerned.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks.