

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
Term 1, 2026-2027

Course Title: LING6920 Topics in Language Acquisition 語言獲得專題

Description:

This course introduces and explores some theoretical and empirical issues in child language acquisition across linguistically diverse bilingual and multilingual contexts. We will compare the language development in monolingual, bilingual and heritage children. A strong emphasis is placed on the interface between theoretical analysis of linguistic phenomena and central research questions in language acquisition. Students are required to conduct a research project using the CHILDES database.

Content, highlighting fundamental concepts

Topics	Key concepts
Theoretical issues in child language acquisition	Formal and functional explanations, nativist and usage-based approaches, domain-general and domain-specific issues
Methods and methodological issues in child language acquisition	Longitudinal corpus-based studies and experimental methods, statistical learning
Issues in bilingual language acquisition Case studies of bilingual children	Development of bilingualism in early childhood, language differentiation, cross-linguistic influence, input ambiguity, vulnerable domains
Heritage language acquisition	Heritage speakers compared with baseline speakers; Similarities and differences in heritage/first/second language acquisition
Development of grammatical constructions: e.g. null objects, relative clauses	object omission and relative clauses will be examined in bilingual children
Features of contact languages in bilingual development	How features of bilingual development parallel features of contact languages

Learning outcomes:

- develop a good grasp of the theoretical and empirical issues that arise in monolingual and bilingual child language acquisition
- identify and address research questions, taking an interdisciplinary perspective on the field of child language acquisition
- appreciate the important relationship between linguistic theory and acquisition research and the centrality of language acquisition in relation to other areas of linguistics
- develop the ability to conduct a small-scale research project on a topic in child language acquisition by using the CHILDES database and programmes

- raise students' awareness of the complexity of language acquisition and deepen their appreciation of children's acquisition of one or more languages - develop ability to learn, discuss with peers and benefit from peer support
Learning activities (via zoom if face-to-face meetings are not feasible) - lecture - use of multimedia materials e.g. audio and video clips - CHILDES workshops - Student presentations - discussion of articles - projects

Learning activities

Lecture	Interactive tutorial	Assigned readings	Discussion of readings	Term Project	Web-based teaching	Other
(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 40	5 0	0 50	0 0	0 0
M NA	M NA	NA M	M NA	NA M	NA NA	NA NA

M: Mandatory activity in the course

O: Optional activity

NA: Not applicable

Assessment scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
Participation in discussion and presentation of assigned articles	Participation in class (responding to questions about weekly readings and contributing to discussion) and presentations based on assigned articles	40%
Term paper (written)	A research project on a topic of interest in monolingual/bilingual/heritage contexts	50%
Term project presentation (oral)	Term project presentation (oral)	10%

Make-up/Late submission policy

Assessment tasks	Extension allowed (Y/N)	Make-up/Late submission policy
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.

Learning resources for students

Language acquisition:

Ambridge, B. and E. Lieven. 2011. *Child Language Acquisition: Contrasting Theoretical Approaches*. Cambridge University Press.

Clark, E. 2009. *First Language Acquisition* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511806698

Guasti, T. 2016. 2nd edition. *Language Acquisition: The Growth of Grammar*. MIT Press.

Russell, J. 2004. *What is language development? Rationalist, Empiricist and Pragmatist approaches to the acquisition of syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bilingual and heritage language acquisition:

Blom, E., L. Cornips and J. Schaeffer. 2017. (eds). *Crosslinguistic Influence in Bilingualism* John Benjamins.

De Houwer, A. 2009. *Bilingual First Language Acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Grüter, T. and J. Paradis. (eds.) 2014. *Input and Experience in Bilingual Development*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Miller, D., F. Bayram, J. Rothman, J. and L. Serratrice. 2018. (eds.) *Bilingual cognition and language: the state of the science across its subfields*. John Benjamins.

Paradis, J., F. Genesee and M. Crago. 2021. 3rd ed. *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*. Brookes Publishing.

Polinsky, M. 2018. *Heritage Languages and Their Speakers*. Cambridge University Press.

Silva-Corvalán, C. 2014. *Bilingual Language Acquisition: Spanish and English in the First Six Years*. Cambridge University Press.

Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. *The Bilingual Child: Language Contact and Early Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Journals in language acquisition and bilingualism:

First Language, Journal of Child Language, Language Acquisition

Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, International Journal of Bilingualism,

Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism

Feedback for evaluation

Students are welcome to give comments and feedback to the instructor by writing to the instructor or talking to her individually.

Grade descriptors:

Grade	Overall Course [LING6920 Topics in Language Acquisition]
A	Demonstration of a thorough and nuanced understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a high degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with full understanding key issues, showing 1) outstanding ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) outstanding ability to present an assigned topic and write an original term paper.
A-	Demonstration of a thorough understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a high degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with only minor weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing 1) excellent ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) excellent ability to present an assigned topic and write an original term paper.
B	Demonstration of a good understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with some weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing 1) good ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) good ability to present an assigned topic and the write a well-organized term paper.
C	Demonstration of an adequate understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and a degree of competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with some weaknesses in understanding key issues, showing 1) adequate ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) adequate ability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.
D	Demonstration of some understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, and limited competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts with major weaknesses in understanding a spectrum of topics, showing 1) weak ability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) weak ability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.
F	Demonstration of minimal understanding of theoretical and methodological issues in the language acquisition topics discussed, with very limited competency in integrating this knowledge and applying it to the analysis of developmental data across monolingual and bilingual contexts, lacking understanding across a spectrum of topics, showing 1) inability to understand and discuss major acquisition issues; 2) inability to present an assigned topic and write a satisfactory term paper.

Course schedule

Class/ week	Topic
Week 1	Issues in child language acquisition: an introduction
&	Guasti, M. T. 2002. Ch.1 Basic concepts.
Week 2	Newmeyer, F. 1998. Ch1. The form-function problem in linguistics, pp.1-21. Newmeyer, F. 2003. Grammar is grammar and usage is usage. <i>Language</i> 79.4.682-707. Evans, N. and S. Levinson. 2009. The myth of language universals: language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> 32. 429–492. Behrens, H. 2009. Usage-based and emergentist approaches to language acquisition <i>Linguistics</i> 47: 383–411. Eisenbeiß, S. 2009. Generative approaches to language learning. <i>Linguistics</i> 47: 273–310.
Week 3	Input factors in language acquisition and methodological issues Crain, S. and P. Pietroski. 2002. Why language acquisition is a snap. <i>Linguistic Review</i> 19:163-183. Pullum, G. and B. Scholtz. 2002. Empirical assessment of stimulus poverty arguments. <i>Linguistic Review</i> 19: 9-50. MacWhinney, B. 2004. A multiple process solution to the logical problem of language acquisition. <i>Journal of Child Language</i> 31: 883-914. Gathercole, V. C. M., and E. Hoff. 2007. Input and the acquisition of language: Three questions. In E. Hoff & M. Shatz (eds.), <i>The Handbook of Language Development</i> , Blackwell Publishers, pp. 107-127. Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Ch2. Section 2.2 The logical problem of bilingual acquisition and the poverty of the dual stimulus, pp.30-33. Gilkerson, J. et al. 2017. Mapping the early language environment using all-day recordings and automated analysis. <i>American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology</i> 26.2.1-18 DOI: 10.1044/2016_AJSLP-15-0169 Byers-Heinlein, Krista & Tsui, Angeline & Bergmann, Christina & Black, Alexis & Brown, Anna & Carbajal, M. Julia & Durrant, Samantha & Fennell, Christopher & Fievet, Anne-Caroline & Frank, Michael & Gampe, Anja & Gervain, Judit & Gonzalez-Gomez, Nayeli & Hamlin, J Kiley & Havron, Naomi & Hernik, Mikołaj & Kerr, Shila & Killam, Hilary & Klassen, Kelsey & Wermelinger, Stephanie. 2021. A multilab study of bilingual infants: exploring the preference for infant-directed speech. <i>Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science</i> . 4. 251524592097462. https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245920974622

Week 4 & Week 5	Issues in bilingual language acquisition Serratrice, L. 2013. Cross-linguistic influence in bilingual development: determinants and mechanisms. <i>Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism</i> 3.3-25. Silva-Corvalán, C. 2014. Ch3. Bilingual development: a linguistic profile of the first six years. pp. 54-119. Yip, V. 2013. Simultaneous Language Acquisition. In F. Grosjean and L. Ping <i>Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism</i>, Wiley-Blackwell. Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2007. Ch2. Theoretical framework. In <i>The Bilingual Child</i>. Bialystok, E. and J. Werker. 2017. Editorial: The systematic effects of bilingualism on children's development. <i>Developmental Science</i> 20.1. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/desc.12535 Ferjan Ramirez, N., Ramirez, R.R., Clarke, M., Taulu, S., Kuhl, P.K. 2016. Speech discrimination in 11-month-old bilingual and monolingual infants: A magnetoencephalography study. <i>Developmental Science</i> http://ilabs.washington.edu/sites/default/files/Ramirez_et_al_2016_DevSci.pdf Mai, Ziyin and Virginia Yip. 2022. Caretaker input and trilingual development of Mandarin, Cantonese and English in early childhood (1;6-2;11). <i>International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism</i>. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2022.2060037 Yip, Virginia and Stephen Matthews. 2022. Language diversity and bilingual first language acquisition: A commentary on Kidd and Garcia (2022). <i>First Language</i> 42.6. https://doi.org/10.1177/01427237221097581
Week 6 & Week 7	Heritage language acquisition Benmamoun, E., S. Montrul and M. Polinsky. 2013. Heritage languages and their speakers: opportunities and challenges for linguistics. <i>Theoretical Linguistics</i> 39. 129–181. Polinsky, M. 2015. When L1 becomes an L3: Assessing grammatical knowledge in heritage speakers/learners. <i>Bilingualism: Language and Cognition</i> 18:163-178. Kupisch, T. and Rothman, J. 2016. Terminology matters! Why difference is not incompleteness and how early child bilinguals are heritage speakers. <i>International Journal of Bilingualism</i>. ISSN 1756-6878 doi: 10.1177/1367006916654355 Mai, Ziyin, Lucy Xia Zhao and Virginia Yip. 2021. The Mandarin ba-construction in

Week 10	Code-mixing in bilingual and trilingual children from a translanguaging perspective Quick, A. E., E. Lieven, A. Backus and M. Tomasello. 2018. Constructively combining languages: The use of code-mixing in German-English bilingual child language acquisition. <i>Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism</i>, 8.3. 393-409. https://doi.org/10.1075/lab.8.3 Treffers-Daller, J. 2024. Unravelling translanguaging: a critical appraisal. <i>ELT Journal</i>, 78 (1). pp. 64-71. doi: https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad058 Li, W. and O. Garcia. 2022. Not a first language but one repertoire: Translanguaging as a decolonizing project. <i>RELC Journal</i> https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882221092841
Week 11	Bilingualism and language contact Ansaldo, U., S. Matthews and G. Smith. 2010. China Coast Pidgin. <i>Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages</i> 25:1: 63-94. Matthews, S. & M. Li. 2013. Chinese Pidgin English. In Michaelis, Susanne Maria & Maurer, Philippe & Haspelmath, Martin & Huber, Magnus (eds.) <i>The survey of pidgin and creole languages</i>. In “The survey of pidgin and creole languages”. Volume 1: English-based and Dutch-based Languages. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://apics-online.info/surveys/20 Yip, V. and S. Matthews. 2017. Ch. 8. Bilingual development and contact-induced grammaticalization. In <i>The Bilingual Child</i>, Cambridge University Press, pp.227-254.
Week 12 & Week 13	Student term project presentations

Professor's contact details

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:	Professor Virginia Yip
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Telephone:	3943-7019
Email:	vcymatthews@cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Venue:	
Website:	Yip's website: http://vyip.cbrchk.org/
Other information:	Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre: http://cbrchk.org/

- **A facility for posting course announcements**

All announcements of the course will be circulated and posted by group email.

- **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 AI tools**

Approach 1 – Prohibit all use of AI tools

Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students' final grade of the course, or used for evaluating students' attainment of the desired learning outcomes. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools.