Lexical Development – TENTATIVE syllabus
Fall 2020

Children acquire new words with astonishing ease and speed. This course will explore theoretical and empirical research pertaining to the mechanisms by which children acquire the meaning of words. Questions to be examined include: Are there special word learning mechanisms? If so, what are some of them? If not, what are the sources of constraint on the acquisition of word meaning? Are the meanings of words from different syntactic categories learned in the same way? How do morpho-syntactic differences between languages influence the acquisition of word meanings? How do statistical properties of the input impact the course of lexical development? What is the role of parental input? Where do syntax-semantics correspondences in lexical development come from? What kinds of errors do children make in acquiring the meanings of novel words? How do they learn to correct these errors? What are the cognitive resources that the child must bring to the task of learning various different kinds of word meanings? We will cover research on the acquisition of the meanings of nouns, verbs, adjectives, spatial prepositions, and personal pronouns. Students will be introduced to the methods available for studying lexical development as well as their limitations.

Learning goals:
• Students will acquire knowledge of key theoretical debates and approaches to word learning
• Students will acquire knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the empirical methods used in word learning research
• Students will acquire in-depth knowledge in key areas of lexical development
• Students will learn how to critically evaluate and present research on lexical development

Evaluation:
2 presentations: 20% each
Participation: 10%
Paper: 50%

Presentations: Each student will do 2 presentations. Two students will present on each topic.

The presentations should: (1) cover the key background/ideas/data/conclusions of the assigned readings; (2) provide a critical assessment of the content of the assigned papers; (3) present additional key findings from papers not assigned; (4) identify key questions for discussion/future research/implications.

All students should read the assigned papers and be prepared to discuss them. The presenters should draw from some additional papers when putting together their presentation and help lead the discussion of the assigned readings.
The two presenters for a session should figure out how they want to divide the presentations (e.g. by paper/by sections of papers/...)

**Paper:** The paper should be a critical review of a topic in lexical development. It could also be in the form of a proposal for experiments that will address an issue in lexical development.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1 ():** Lexical development—Is there such a thing? What may theory of lexical development look like? Key issues in lexical development. Theories of concepts.

**Week 2 ():** contd.

**Week 3 ():** Early competence


**Week 4 ():** Names for objects and substances


**Week 5 ():** Acquiring adjective meanings

Week 6: Acquisition of verb meanings


Week 7: Pragmatic knowledge in word learning


Week 8: Attention in word learning


Yu, C., Suanda, S. H., & Smith, L. B. Infant sustained attention but not joint attention to objects at 9 months predicts vocabulary at 12.


Week 9: Acquiring spatial terms


Week 10 (): Temporal terms and metaphor


Week 11 (): Number word acquisition


Week 12 (): Polysemy


Week 13 (): Cross-situational learning


**Week 14 (): Sortals & the formal dimension of common sense lexical concepts**

**Week 15 (): contd & wrap-up**