Course Logistics:  
**Class meetings:** Thursdays 4-7pm West Hall 409  
**Instructor:** Anne-Michelle Tessier  
**Office hours:** Wednesdays 2-4pm Lorch Hall 453-C  
**Contact:** tessiera@umich.edu

Course materials: Handouts, slides or any readings not Mirlyn-available will be posted to CTools. There is no textbook or coursepack.

Prerequisites: One of LING313, 315 or 316, or permission of the instructor

Course Description: Language acquisition is at the centre of both linguistic theory and everyday language use, but the acquisition process itself is difficult to observe as it unfolds within the human mind. The goal of this course is to survey a diverse range of experimental methods for getting at the nature of language acquisition, primarily of phonological and also morpho-phonological and morpho-syntactic grammars.

Course Goals: The aim of the class is to tackle the following questions:

(i) how do linguists study linguistic competence via experimental behavior?  
(ii) how can an experimental study hope to test or compare theoretical claims?  
(iii) which kinds of tasks tap into which kinds of grammatical knowledge?

Course Requirements: This class’s weekly meetings will all be based on readings and published experimental data. The first two thirds of each class meeting will be a student-led presentation and discussion of assigned readings; the last third will be spent designing related novel experiments that test linguistic claims of interest to participants.

Course Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on the basis of two reading presentations (40%), experimental proposals (15%), class participation (15%) and a final project (30%). **The most important thing you need to do for this class is to read the readings**, well enough that you can talk about them in class. The week-by-week schedule on the syllabus has all the readings we will choose from (almost), though sometimes we will decide to use only a subset of the reading list.

Presentations: Every enrolled student will present two readings over the semester, each using the first hour of a class meeting. The purpose of your presentation is to bring everyone in the class to a sufficient understanding of the paper that its methods can be discussed with the course’s goals in mind. Presenters should prepare a handout or slides, especially including materials and results, and should be prepared to lead ensuing discussion.

Related to Presentations: Discussion Questions By the end of Monday of the week you are presenting a paper, presenters are required to post three discussion questions on the course’s Forum in CTools, which will prepare us all for the issues you would like to raise, or draw our attention to which parts of the paper you want to focus on, or indicate an aspect of the paper you don’t think you understand sufficiently. I might often add comments to your discussion points topic on the forum too, so you will want to check it during the week leading up to Thursday as well.
Experimental Proposals: In the last hour of each class, we will discuss possible experiments that use the methods discussed in the readings, or better ones that we invent, to ask questions of interest to class’ members. To ensure equal representation of everyone’s interest: every week one student will be responsible for proposing an experimental design or question to the class, related to the week’s readings or associated topics. The proposal can be of one of the following forms:

i) Here is an empirical question about acquisition; how can we ask it experimentally?
ii) Here is a theoretical prediction about acquisition; how can we test it experimentally?
iii) Here is a theoretical question about language; does it make any predictions about acquisition? (Corollary: if it doesn’t, are we worried?)
iv) Here is a methodological concern about this kind of acquisition study; how can we address it?

... or maybe something else that I haven’t thought of. The point is to think about how the methods and/or experimental questions in the paper(s) we’ve read could, should or can’t be used in studying natural human language acquisition, using concrete examples. The experimental proposal, then, is one concrete example.

Final Papers/Projects will be discussed more in class. For graduate students, the final project is an original pilot experiment or learning algorithm, written up as a term paper; for undergraduates the final project can instead be a mid-length term paper (12 pages or so) which synthesizes and contrasts two or more different hypotheses about language acquisition and compares empirical evidence for each. By the time Spring Break rolls around, you will need a topic, and I will start harassing you more about what you are going to do with your topic from then on. Handouts on content, style and planning will be provided.

Course Policies:

1. If you miss class, check the CTools site, and see what you missed. Get the class handout from the presenter. Everyone misses class once in a great while, so don’t worry about it. But if you are having a health problem or other difficulty such that you are missing multiple classes, be in touch with me as soon as possible. This class is all discussion based, so if you are not in class I can’t evaluate you.

2. If you are shy about asking questions and participating in class discussion: I understand. But for this class to be successful, you must make an effort. It may take you more preparation and planning to be able to participate than it does for more extroverted students, but it is still your responsibility to put in that extra work. If you are not sure how to participate, come talk to me in office hours.

3. If you have a quick question about readings or anything else, send me an email, as I am online far too often. For longer questions or concerns, please come to office hours – particularly if you feel lost or otherwise confused about the work, the readings, the final project or the expectations of the class. If you can’t make office hours, send me an email and we can always find a time to meet. I am on campus at least most Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays all day. The more effort you are putting into the class, the more I will be willing to give you extra support in office hours or by email.

4. If I am talking too fast, interrupt me at any time to ask me to slow down. If your cell phone is on, please make it be silent or I reserve the right to throw a big embarrassing fit when it goes off in class.
### Week by Week Schedule

(subject to change, with class consent.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>Overview: Language Acquisition + Linguistic Theory and also About Presenting Papers</td>
<td>Jusczyk, Houston and Newsome (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>Preferential Listening: Natural Language</td>
<td>Jusczyk, Houston and Newsome (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>Preferential Listening + Visual fixations</td>
<td>Werker, Fennell, Corocan and Stager (2002); Swingley (2009)</td>
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<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Diary Studies (and similar)</td>
<td>Becker and Tessler (2011); Kiparsky and Menn (1977)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 23</td>
<td>Guest Lectures: Current Language Acquisition Research at Michigan!</td>
<td>Beck (in prep.); TBA</td>
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<td>Mar 1</td>
<td><strong>SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>Mar 8</td>
<td>Identification/picture pointing tasks</td>
<td>Skoruppa, Mani &amp; Peperkamp (in press)</td>
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<td>Mar 15</td>
<td>Non-word repetition + meta-ling. tasks</td>
<td>Baddeley, Gathercole and Papagno (1998); Thorn and Gathercole (1999); Edwards, Munson and Beckman (2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 22</td>
<td>Back to artificial language learning</td>
<td>Lany, Gomez and Gerken (2007); Hupbach, Gomez, Bootzin and Nadel (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 5</td>
<td>Grammaticality/acceptability judgments</td>
<td>Becker, Kegrez and Nevins (2011); Pertz and Bever (1975)</td>
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<td>Apr 12</td>
<td><strong>Final Project Presentations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 19</td>
<td><strong>Final Papers Due</strong></td>
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Reading List


Juszczyk, Peter, Derek Houston and Mary Newsome (1999). The beginnings of word segmentation in English-learning infants. *Cognitive Psychology* 39: 159-207.


Skoruppa, Katrin, Nivedita Mani and Sharon Peperkamp (in press). Toddlers’ processing of phonological alternations: Early compensation for assimilation in English and French. To appear in *Child Development*. [To be available on Ctools]


