

BCS II Course
9.012

Language Acquisition

Study Questions:

1. What kind of evidence do linguists give for hypothesized “principles” of language? To what extent are these arbitrary and to what extent do they relate to evidence? Know some examples of the kinds of evidence that would be used for or against particular principles. A particular case in point is *X-bar* theory. Why are 3 levels of structure needed?
2. What kind of evidence is relevant to the question of the “innateness” of principles? What is the “argument from the Poverty of the Stimulus”? What kind of evidence is available to the language learner? E.g. negative evidence? Meaning/intentions? What differences are there in the emergence of correct “principles” and correct “parameters” in child language? What do these differences add to the question of learning versus innateness of language?
3. What is the “optional infinitive” stage of language development? What is known to the child and what is not known? What kinds of evidence tell us what children know about parameters and inflection at very young ages? Consider concrete cases, like the verb raising parameter and the verb second parameter.
4. What kinds of quasi “biological” evidence are available to provide evidence concerning development (genetically timed growth, i.e. a species of innateness) versus learning? Behavioral genetic, impairment, etc. Have in mind some concrete examples.
5. Is there any kind of “learning theory” that might be able to characterize the development of language?
6. What kind of evidence can be used to separate particular hypotheses in linguistic development? Are there empirical differences between “processing” models and “representational” models?