

# Language Acquisition

PSY 450 023 – Fall 2017

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The question of how children acquire language is an incredibly fascinating one. Acquiring language is a daunting task: children need to learn how to use a range of tools, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and of course, an extensive vocabulary. For adults, learning a new language is never easy and is often a slow, frustrating experience. Yet, children manage to figure out the complexity of their native language in a very short time and relying on immature cognitive skills. In the span of just a few years, infants acquire the ability to not only understand what people around them are saying but also comment, question, and express their ideas in the language of their community. How does this process unfold? What information needs to be already available at birth, and what has to be actively learned? How can a little baby deal with the sheer complexity of the linguistic system?

In addressing these questions, the course will present the latest empirical data on what infants and children know about language—and do with it—at various ages and developmental stages, as well as discuss and analyze the main theoretical approaches in the field. Furthermore, the course will provide in-depth coverage of language development in special populations (including deaf children, children with autism, Down syndrome, and specific language impairment), childhood bilingualism, and second language acquisition in adults. The course should be of interest to students of psychology, education, and linguistics.