Teaching Resources for Chapter 6

**Links**

**•** [*intermediate*] This link is to the lab site for John Trueswell at the University of Pennsylvania. It provides an overview about how that lab studies children’s on-line processing of language, including pictures of different kinds of eye-tracking set-ups and a short video showing the way children’s eyes move in a task. http://www.ircs.upenn.edu/~truesweb/research.html

• [*intermediate*] This link is to the stimuli section of Jeffrey Lidz’s lab at the University of Maryland. Dr. Lidz conducts many studies looking at very young children’s early syntactic abilities and you can see the same videos the children do. The videos on “Question Words” and “Pronouns” are particularly relevant for this chapter.

http://ling.umd.edu/labs/acquisition/?page=stimuli

• [*intermediate*] On this webpage, Stephen Crain of MacQuarie University has pulled together several short clips of children participating in experiments from his lab studying various detailed aspects of children’s developing syntax. Each video begins with a short explanation of the study before showing key conditions.

http://www.maccs.mq.edu.au/laboratories/acquisition/languagevideos.html

• [*intermediate*] The data from the three children studied by Roger Brown – Adam, Eve, and Sarah – are available on the CHILDES website. You can see them here: http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/browser/index.php?url=Eng-USA/Brown/

**Activities for Students**

• It is easy to administer the Wug task yourself! Put together a brief Wug task of your own that tests knowledge of the past tense, plurals, possessives, and the –er suffix for someone who habitually does something (i.e., a *builder* is someone who habitually *builds*). The Wikipedia website on the Wug task can give you some guidance, as can many other websites. Administer your test to some adult friends, and if possible, to some children. Are some morphemes easier or harder for people to do? What factors influence people’s performance?

• Examine the development of questions in the CHILDES database. Start here: http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/browser/. On the left side of the page you will see the names of several languages – click on the language you want to investigate. You will then see the names of researchers who have donated their transcripts of children’s narratives. Choose any of the researchers and then keep clicking on choices from the left-hand menus until transcripts appear in the large box on the right.

Read through three transcripts of the same child at two different ages (the children’s files are in order by age). Write down how many times the child asks a question and note down how they do it: Do they use intonation alone? Do they use a yes-no question? Do they use a wh-word? If so, what wh-word do they use? What do you notice about the development of children’s use of questions from this small sample? What do you think you would find if you did a more systematic investigation?

• You can also use the CHILDES database to calculate the MLU for any of the files. To do this, you will need to use the command box (on the left, below the list of files). Choose MLU from the drop down menu, and enter the name of a file into the textbox (e.g. eve20.cha). First, look at the development of MLU over age by entering each file from a single child in order (the files are listed in order by age). What do you notice about the changes in MLU over time? Are there any sharp breaks? Are there any outlier files? Then, choose 3 files and look at the MLU’s of all the speakers in those files. Compare the MLU’s of the adults and the children present in the transcripts. Discuss any patterns you find and anything you find unexpected.

**Online Movies**

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| Movie Name | Access | Description | Time |
| Acquisition of Syntax stimuli | http://ling.umd.edu/labs/acquisition/?page=stimuli | Webpage from the Lidz lab containing several examples of stimuli used for IPL studies looking at aspects of syntax acquisition | Variable, most under a minute |
| Acquisition of Syntax Samples | http://www.maccs.mq.edu.au/laboratories/acquisition/languagevideos.html | Webpage from the Crain lab containing several well produced videos of children demonstrating phenomena in the acquisition of syntax | Variable, most around 3 – 5 minutes |
| The Secret Life of Scientists and Engineers: Jean Berko Gleason and Wugs | http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElabA5YICsA | A brief, slightly humorous piece from NOVA in which Jean Berko Gleason administers the Wug task to an adult. | 1:43 |

**Movies on CD**

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| 1.4  Child at 3 years | On Existing Student CD | Mimi at 3 years. Mimi is a monolingual English-learning child playing with blocks. Illustrates well:  • More advanced (but still not adult-like) phonology  • Adult-child interactions  • Appropriate level syntactic abilities | :53 |
| 1.5  Child at 5 years | On Existing Student CD | Avelina at 5;6. Avelina is a monolingual English-learning child talking with an unfamiliar adult.  Illustrates well:  • Telling of a personal narrative  • Adult scaffolding of narrative  • Appropriate level syntactic and phonological abilities | :48 |

**Quicktime Movies**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Wug Task: 9-year-old | Quicktime movie file | A 9-year-old boy engages in the Wug task and demonstrates his knowledge of plural formation | 0:26 |
| Act Out Task: Understanding the Passive (8-year-old) | Quicktime movie file | An 8-year-old girl acts out simple, reversible, passive sentences correctly. | 0:30 |

**Sample Test Questions**

1. Language productivity (or generativity) refers to the fact that:
   1. human knowledge of language can produce an infinite number of different sentences.
   2. children produce language spontaneously.
   3. researchers have produced (or generated) a large body of research about language structure.
   4. children’s skill in producing language is typically behind their skill in comprehending it.
2. Which of the following is true about Open and Closed class words in language?
   1. closed class words are content words and open class words are function words.
   2. open class words are content words and closed class words are function words.
   3. open class words are verbs and adjectives and closed class words are nouns.
   4. closed class words are verbs and adjectives and open class words are nouns.
3. The progressive morpheme “-ing” (as in “Amy is sing**ing**”) is:
   1. a free morpheme, because it adds meaning to the verb.
   2. a free morpheme, because it is free from any ordering constraints.
   3.  a bound morpheme, because it adds meaning to the verb but it cannot stand alone in the sentence.
   4. a bound morpheme, because a speaker is bound to use it frequently.
4. Telegraphic speech is missing which of the following?
   1. Function words and bound morphemes
   2. Nouns and verbs
   3. Free morphemes
   4. Declarative statements
5. The meanings expressed by children’s 2-word utterances:
   1. are largely restricted to descriptions of inanimate objects.
   2. include several kinds of basic relations among actors, objects and actions.
   3. cannot be deduced due to children’s limited expressiveness.
   4. are just as complex as the meanings expressed in the adult language.

1. Children omit function words in telegraphic speech because:
   1. children have limited processing abilities and omit the words that are less necessary for conveying meaning.
   2. function words are less prominent acoustically and children omit these smaller phonetic elements.
   3. children do not understand their meaning and omit words they see as irrelevant.
   4. all of the above reasons have been proposed to explain children’s omissions.
2. Individual differences in children’s grammatical development show that:
   1. children who adopt a holistic style in which they focus on the overall tune of a sentence tend to acquire their grammar much later than children who adopt an analytic style in which they focus on the smallest pieces of the sentence.
   2. children who adopt an analytic style are extremely frequent, while children who adopt a holistic style are quite common.
   3. children are equally successful at learning a grammar regardless of whether they adopt a holistic or analytic style.
   4. there are no individual differences in children’s grammatical development.
3. Across languages:
   1. children generally learn morphemes which are highly frequent and perceptually salient first.
   2. children always learn the morphology on verbs before the morphology on nouns.
   3. children always learn the morphology on nouns before the morphology on verbs.
   4. there are no differences in morphology across languages, so there are no differences in when or how children learn them.
4. The Mean Length of Utterance (MLU):
   1. is a simple way to describe children’s grammars.
   2. is a good predictor of children’s grammatical abilities.
   3. is not a very good predictor of children’s grammatical abilities.
   4. directly correlates with age: all typically developing children are at the same MLU at the same age.

1. The development of children’s use of questions shows that:
   1. children seem uninterested in asking questions until they can use wh-words appropriately.
   2. children do not use the appropriate prosody for questions (that is, question intonation, which rises at the end of the sentence) until they regularly use wh-words.
   3. children understand both interpretations of a complex wh-question (“When did the boy say he hurt himself?”) while still in preschool.
   4. children do not master yes-no questions until the school age years.

1. Young children’s ability to comprehend language:
   1. are generally ahead of their ability to produce the same language.
   2. develop at exactly the same rate as their ability to produce language since both depend on the same underlying representations.
   3. are extremely difficult to test and have been very little studied.
   4. show that children comprehend very little of the language they hear or produce.
2. Children’s ability to correctly infer the meaning of nonsense words in different morphological and syntactic contexts demonstrates that:
   1. Children’s knowledge of morphology and syntax depends on their knowledge of open class words.
   2. children have productive grammatical rules describing those contexts.
   3. children are dependent on social interactions to guide their word learning.
   4. children are unable to infer the meanings of nonsense words from context.
3. Children’s past tense overregularizations (e.g. saying “goed” instead of “went”) demonstrate that:
   1. children do not yet understand how to say the past tense.
   2. children must memorize all the different forms of their language.
   3. children do not pay close attention to the input from their parents.
   4. children have learned the regular rule for the past tense.
4. The continuity assumption argues that:
   1. children must continually learn from adults in order to learn language.
   2. children and adults both have the same kinds of grammatical representations. Differences between adults and children arise from experience-based knowledge and processing limitations of children.
   3. children and adults have the different kinds of grammatical representations from each other, and they continue to do so.
   4. children are born knowing their native language and they continue to use it throughout their lifespan.
5. Constructivist and Nativist accounts of language development DISAGREE about which of the following:
   1. whether or not a child is born knowing their native language.
   2. whether or not a child must receive adequate amounts of input from adults.
   3.  whether or not a child is born with language-oriented biases that help them use input from adults to learn their native language.
   4. the two accounts agree about all the above items.
6. Explain the difference between a prescriptive and a descriptive grammatical rule. Be sure to (1) give an example of each kind of rule, (2) discuss the consequences of breaking each type of rule, and (3) discuss the role that each kind of rule plays in the study of language development.
7. Describe Berko’s Wug task and explain how children’s responses to this task are used to draw inferences about their understanding of grammar.

##### Describe children’s early word combination. What kinds of words do children typically include and typically omit in these combinations? Discuss why children include and omit these particular items, and the impact that their choices have on the kinds of meanings they express.