

Spring 1995

**LING 822: Semantic Constraints on Language Acquisition**

Instructor: Clifton Pye, Blake 427, 4-3450

Office hours: TR 1:30-3:00

Linguistic theory posits a number of substantive constraints on the form of human languages in order to explain the limits of language variation and the possibility of language acquisition. This course will examine the semantic constraints that researchers have proposed to account for language acquisition, e.g., Clark's Principle of Contrast and Markman's Whole-Object Constraint. We will discuss the role semantic constraints play in theories about the acquisition of syntax and evaluate the semantic constraints in the light of philosophical discussions concerning the nature of semantic representation.

The course grade will be based upon class presentations, written response papers, a term paper, and class participation. Each student will be responsible for presenting written responses to the articles in the textbook. The responses should take the form of a critical summary of the article with particular attention to the logical problem of meaning acquisition. During the course of the semester each student will develop a term paper theme with the instructor. Each student will hand in a draft of the term paper for the course.

The textbooks for the seminar are:

1. *Perspectives on Language and Thought* edited by Susan Gelman & James Byrnes
2. *Representation and Reality* by Hilary Putnam

Course readings:

1. Introduction: semantic bootstrapping and semantic mapping  
Pinker 1984 & 1989  
Byrnes & Gelman, Perspectives on thought and language  
Approaches to word meaning
2. Clark, Acquisitional principles in lexical development
3. Markman, The whole-object, taxonomic, and mutual exclusivity assumptions
4. Waxman, Convergences between semantic and conceptual organization
5. Gelman & Coley, Language and categorization
6. Keil, Theories, concepts, and the acquisition of word meaning
7. Gentner & Rattermann, Language and the career of similarity
8. Nelson, The matter of time
9. Shatz & Wilcox, Constraints on the acquisition of English modals
10. Byrnes, Acquisition and development of *if* and *because*
11. Choi & Bowerman. 1991. Learning to express motion events in English and Korean. *Cognition* 41.83-121.
12. Putnam, *Representation and Reality*  
Chapters 1 & 2

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A Time Line

Date	Discussant	Reading
Jan 13	Cliff	Introduction: semantic bootstrapping and semantic mapping Pinker 1984 & 1989 Byrnes & Gelman, Perspectives on thought and language Approaches to word meaning
Jan 20	Laura	Clark, Acquisitional principles in lexical development
Jan 27	Cliff	Markman, The whole-object, taxonomic, and mutual exclusivity assumptions
Feb 3	Catherine	Waxman, Convergences between semantic and conceptual organization
Feb 10	Karen	Gelman & Coley, Language and categorization
Feb 17	Olufunke	Keil, Theories, concepts, and the acquisition of word meaning
Feb 24	Su Dong	Gentner & Rattermann, Language and the career of similarity
Mar 3	Sean	Nelson, The matter of time
Mar 10	Karla	Shatz & Wilcox, Constraints on the acquisition of English modals
Mar 17	Khym	Byrnes, Acquisition and development of <i>if</i> and <i>because</i>
Mar 24	SPRING BREAK	
Mar 31	Alice	Choi & Bowerman. 1991. Learning to express motion events in English and Korean. <i>Cognition</i> 41.83-121.
Apr 7	Laura, Catherine, <del>Karen</del>	Oral presentations of first drafts
Apr 14	Olufunke, Su Dong, <del>Sean</del>	"
Apr 21	Karla, Khym, <del>Alice</del>	"
Apr 28	Cliff	Putnam & conclusions

May 8th