Psychology 4346.001: Debates in Language Development Research
Fall 2012
T-Th 11:00 – 12:15, BH 207

Lisa Comparini
Office: BH 317
Office hours: T, Th 3:30-4:30, W 10:30-1:30, or by appointment
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X 2184

Introduction to the Course

This course will introduce you to major theories and topics in the field of language development with a focus on language as a social and cultural phenomenon. We will explore the relationship between language and social cognition, consider evolutionary and comparative work in the field, as well as interdisciplinary work on language as a social and cultural phenomenon. Another important contrast we will highlight is between approaches that consider language to a) differentially reflect developmental accomplishments in various social and cognitive developmental domains or to b) provide a platform from which these accomplishments are said to emerge. Throughout the semester, you will have ongoing opportunities to read, discuss, and critically evaluate works in child language development and to discuss and analyze the application of these works to the everyday contexts within which children develop.

Student Learning Outcomes
- Critically evaluate research in child language development through active reading and class discussion of primary source readings
- Explicate theoretical tensions in the field through weekly written “squibs”
- Expand on theoretical positions and empirical findings (possibly even apply these to everyday contexts within which children develop) through a final research paper

Design of the course

Seminar: Each week, class time will be devoted to probing and discussing the details of the readings for that week. Pairs of students will be assigned the responsibility of leading class discussions on particular readings.

Readings: All readings are to be completed before the class during which we will discuss them so that you will be able to fully participate in the class. If you do not feel that you have completely understood everything you have read, your participation in class should focus on asking questions and helping your fellow students to clarify key points. In this way, your (individual and collective, i.e. as a class) understanding of what you read will sharpen over the semester.
Weekly writing assignments: Each week, for the first 4 weeks, you and a fellow student in the class will prepare a squib (a summary plus commentary that is designed to promote discussion of the author’s work) on one of the weekly readings. For weeks 5 – 8, you and your partner will prepare a squib relating two of the readings, and for weeks 9 – 13, you and your partner will write a squib comparing 3 of the weekly readings. I will give you some guidelines to use when preparing your squibs. I ask that you post these to Bb in the discussion board prepared for this purpose no later than noon on the day before class each week so that I and your classmates can have a chance to review each other’s thoughts on the readings before coming to class.

Final paper: In your final paper (around 6-8 pages, due on or before the last day of class) you should synthesize material from one section of the course (either the section on Cognitive Foundations, Social Cognitive Development, or Social and Cultural Approaches). Each student is required to have at least one “planning meeting” with me prior to beginning writing, and will also submit a draft at least one week prior to the due date. Readings from the “additional suggested readings” list can be used to supplement class readings. More detailed instructions will be given in class.

Participation: The participation grade includes participation in class discussions, Blackboard discussion forums, individual meetings during office hours, and general adherence to classroom policies (e.g. submitting written work on time and in the requested format, arriving for class on time, etc.). Consistent and informed participation is expected of all students. This means that not only should you meaningfully contribute class discussions, but that your comments, questions and contributions should show that you have carefully read and reflected on the assigned material so that you are prepared for class meetings.

Getting help outside of class. I encourage you to meet with me at any time that you feel stuck or have questions or just want some feedback. In my experience, students who do this do significantly better in my courses. I am willing to answer virtually any question pertaining to the course. I want you to succeed in this class and will try to help you in any way I can. Second, I encourage you to form study groups to help you compare your understanding of complicated concepts. Third, I strongly encourage you to make use of the writing center. The folks there are trained to help you with all kinds of different writing forms, and are great resources for helping with organization and style (you will be entirely responsible for the content), and they are terrific at helping you polish your thinking through writing. Check the schedule online http://critical.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home or email for an appointment at Writing-Center@tamu.edu.

Blackboard. We will use Bb for posting important class documents including the syllabus, specific instructions for the various writing assignments, announcements, etc. You are also welcome and encouraged to contribute to the discussion boards as another form of participation in the course.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all classes. I will not take attendance, though your consistent and informed participation (impossible if you are absent!) is an important part of your final grade. In-class writing assignments may be given and will constitute part of the participation grade. If you miss a class, you will need to arrange to get notes and other
information (e.g. announcements) from a fellow student. Students who are absent may not make up in-class assignments for attendance credit.

Final grades\(^1\): Your final grade will be calculated based on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly squibs</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINAL COURSE GRADE</strong></td>
<td><strong>/ 500 points</strong></td>
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\(^{90-100\%} (450 – 500 pts.) - A indicates work of distinction, of exceptionally high quality\)

\(^{80-89\%} (400 – 449 pts.) - B indicates good work, but not of distinction\)

\(^{70-79\%} (350 – 399 pts.) - C indicates average work and satisfaction of University degree requirements\)

\(^{60-69\%} (300 – 349 pts.) - D indicates marginal work\)

\(^{Below 60\%} (below 300 pts.) - F indicates unacceptable work\)

Academic Honesty Policy

As is true of all institutions of higher learning and intellectual communities in general, academic integrity is very highly valued at TAMUCC. I take this issue very seriously such that cheating on exams, plagiarism, and unauthorized collaboration on materials that are turned in will be strongly sanctioned. Make sure you are familiar with all the information on TAMUCC’s Academic Honesty Policy at [http://www.tamucc.edu/catalog/archives/Catalog03/Undergraduate/generali/general.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/catalog/archives/Catalog03/Undergraduate/generali/general.html) and if you have any questions or are unclear about anything, by all means please talk with me or contact someone at the Tutoring and Learning center [http://falcon.tamucc.edu/~tlcweb/si.htm](http://falcon.tamucc.edu/~tlcweb/si.htm) before engaging in any questionable behavior.

Students with Disabilities

TAMUCC is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. I am too. If you have a documented disability (or you think you may have a disability) and, as a result need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class or complete course requirements, then

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\(^1\) **Grade Appeal Process.** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.
you should contact the office of Disability Services at X 5816 (http://disabilityservices.tamucc.edu/) as soon as possible to request such accommodations. Disability Services is located in Driftwood 101. In addition, make sure to speak with me so that I can help accommodate your particular needs.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING:** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.
Tentative Course Outline

SECTION I, INTRODUCTION: NATIVIST VS. NON-NATIVIST APPROACHES

Week 1: Is language an instinct?
⇒ Readings:

Week 2: Cognitive vs. functionalist approaches
⇒ Readings:

Additional suggested readings:

SECTION II: COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS

Week 3: Perspective-taking
⇒ Readings:

Week 4: Theory of Mind and Language
⇒ Readings:

Additional suggested readings:

**SECTION III: SOCIAL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

**Week 5: Social Cognition**

⇒ Readings:

**Week 6: Pointing**

⇒ Readings:

**Week 7: Joint attention**

⇒ Readings:

**Week 8: Evolutionary and comparative perspectives**

Page 6 of 8
Readings:

Additional suggested readings:

**SECTION IV: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL APPROACHES**

**Week 9: Language and Social Interaction**


**Week 10: Culture and cognitive development**

Week 1: Language Socialization

⇒ Readings:

Week 12: Grammar and interaction

⇒ Readings:

Week 13: Language and Self

⇒ Readings:

Additional suggested readings:

**Week 14: Overview and Future directions**

⇒ Readings: TBA  
⇒ Final capstone discussion, debate  
⇒ FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS ON THIS DATE OR EARLIER