

Ling 240 Assignment

Due: **Wednesday, August 22nd, 2007**

**Homework #5: Language acquisition and critical period (2 pages); total 10 points**

This homework should be typed, STAPLED (if necessary), and handed in on Wednesday at the beginning of class.

In your answers, make sure to use your own words and cite specific examples and evidence from the various readings/videos. (Don't just say something vague like "one of the readings said ...". Rather, say what the specific example is and give a citation to the relevant reading, such as, "One example discussed in Crain and Nakayama was ...")

1. Describe the stages that children go through when learning the past tense forms of regular and irregular verbs in English. Why is this kind of learning often referred to as U-shaped learning? (1pt)

2. Crain and Nakayama (1987) point out that we might expect children to initially make mistakes as they are learning the Subject-Auxiliary Inversion rule. "Since the structure-independent operation [Hypothesis I] seems to be computationally simpler than Hypothesis II ... and since it [Hypothesis I] is consistent with this subset of primary linguistic data, one might suppose that at least some children entertain Hypothesis I during grammatical development... These children would produce ungrammatical questions like 7 when they first attempt to form yes/no questions with complex Subject NPs."

a) Give the yes/no question version of (i) below according to Crain & Nakayama's Hypothesis I. Then give the yes/no question version of (i) according to their Hypothesis II. (Label your sentences Hyp. I and Hyp. II; and check their paper for what Hyp. I & II were). (0.5pt each)

(i) *The woman who John is talking to can sing well.*

b) Crain and Nakayama show that children never, in fact, produce sentences like their sentence (7) (the yes/no question formed according to Hypothesis I). How did Crain and Nakayama get 3- to 5-year-old children to produce questions with relative clauses in them? Give the specific instruction to the children that was used in the experiment, and discuss the logic behind the specific instruction (i.e., why did they use the particular instruction that they did?) (1pt)

c) The point of the Poverty-of-the-Stimulus argument is that the primary linguistic data is consistent with both the structure-dependent and structure-independent versions of the SAI (subject-auxiliary inversion) rule. Specifically, what type of sentence is claimed not to exist in the input to children? (See the discussion in class of Legate and Yang on Aug. 15) (1pt)

d) Is the conclusion that the SAI rule itself is innate (and hence universal)? What specifically is claimed to be part of Universal Grammar? (1pt)

3. We saw that children make some errors (i.e., produce non-adult-like utterances) with respect to past tense and SAI. Discuss the implications of these errors for the view that language acquisition happens all by children's imitation of what parents say (for the imitation theory of language acquisition, review the discussion in the language acquisition video as well as Jackendoff Chapter 8). (1pt)

4. Use the following readings to help you answer the questions in this section:

- Jackendoff Chapter 9
- Curtiss et al. 1974 "The Linguistic Development of Genie".

a) According to the Curtiss article, what types of linguistic constructions was Genie able to acquire? What types of linguistic constructions were problematic for Genie as of 11/73? (Give a minimum of two examples for each. Details from both the text and the Appendices are relevant) (1pt)

b) Discuss specific ways in which Genie's linguistic development differed from the usual case of a child acquiring English. (For background, you can refer to the chapters on acquisition in Jackendoff and O'Grady which talk about stages of acquisition.) (1pt)

c) Discuss ways in which these data show support for the Critical Period Hypothesis. **Make sure to explain what the Critical Hypothesis is and what it predicts in this case.** (1pt)

d) One may argue that Genie was in fact challenged in general cognitive abilities due to the child abuse, not just in linguistic abilities, and hence that Genie's case does not really support the critical period hypothesis that is specific to linguistic development. Discuss Chelsea's case (mentioned in Jackendoff's chapter 9) to rebut this argument. (1pt)