


S19 - Sem: Langu Concept Acquisition

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[Summary](#) [List of responses](#)

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COURSE ASSESSMENT – SPRING 2019

1 How did this course contribute to your intellectual growth?

Respondent	Response
	This class added a lot to my intellectual growth, as I feel like I learned a lot of specific knowledge on different topics related to language acquisition, but also more generally I gained a lot of experience and practice with critical thinking in relation to evaluating arguments and sources.
	It encouraged me to broaden my understanding of both linguistics and psychology and how the two fields interact. I really enjoyed this aspect of the course.
	I can't put my finger on any specifics, but this was a good course and I ended up learning a lot, so that's intellectual growth right there.
	The critical thought questions for homework and the in-class thought exercises both forced me to think critically about the material and push beyond regurgitation and into synthesis. Discussions with classmates on questions that had no given correct answer also encouraged critical thinking and balanced consideration of different perspectives.
	Gained knowledge through the readings
Total responses to question	5/5

2 How did this course contribute to your critical thinking abilities? (e.g., challenging assumptions, contrasting perspectives on an issue)

Respondent	Response
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Respondent	Response
	<p>Coming up with the critical thought questions were certainly a good exercise in synthesizing material, and trying to extend or connect the questions the papers were asking in a meaningful way; sometimes the questions were not so great, but sometimes I felt like I came up with a meaningful question that I was excited for my peers to comment on or to share my own thought about. The thought exercises were also challenging in good way; it was quite difficult to formulate coherent answers in that short of a time period (which may be part of the point), but they always forced us to consider aspects of the studies or arguments we were reading in a different way than they were presented in the papers. The thought exercises in conjunction with our class discussions raised questions about methodologies, data analysis, presentation of arguments to the larger media as well as bringing up issues about how the conclusions drawn from data conducted with a certain can or cannot be applied to groups of other cultures or background; I felt like after we discussed one issue of this sort, we would continuously bring these questions up in subsequent discussions. I know this type of critical questioning is something that will continue on into my other classes and studies.</p>
	<p>It pushed me to work through actively comprehending the literature and challenge findings rather than passively accept what was presented.</p>
	<p>The CTQs and thought exercises were both good at eliciting critical thinking. Additionally, we discussed a lot of debates and conflicts in the literature that were helpful for thinking critically about evidence. It was interesting to realize that when you dive deeply into a topic, there are always a lot of different opinions and interpretations.</p>
	<p>The critical thought questions for homework and the in-class thought exercises both forced me to think critically about the material and push beyond regurgitation and into synthesis. Discussions with classmates on questions that had no given correct answer also encouraged critical thinking and balanced consideration of different perspectives.</p>
	<p>I think the idea of CTEs was to challenge our critical thinking abilities, but I think I would have been able to practice critical thinking better if we could take the questions home to fully flush it out in a 1-page response paper (or something) instead of only having 15 minutes to write whatever the first thought that comes to mind is</p>
<p>Total responses to question</p>	<p>5/5</p>

3 In what way did this course contribute to your knowledge of diverse individuals, groups, or cultures?

Respondent	Response
	<p>As I said in the above the question, we learned that we should be considering populations outside of the typical WIERD subject pool that psychology often draws from, and think about whether results of particular studies could extend to other groups, what would have to be changed to test a different population, and whether a different group should even be evaluated on the same measures. Additionally, Professor Flaherty did include reading that conducted research on diverse groups where there was research available which added a lot to our class discussions.</p>
	<p>Before this class, I didn't have much of an understanding of how diversity is (and isn't) represented in the field and the need to counter WEIRD-centric literature. This is something I will take with me well beyond this class.</p>
	<p>I liked how there was a definite effort to include various cultures and linguistic experiences. There were practical and theoretical discussions about different populations that were both enriching and contributed to a greater understanding of the topic as a whole. Honestly, I don't have any complaints about this except that psychology as a whole needs to improve in its diversity of subjects.</p>

Respondent	Response
	<p>There was a great, concerted effort to consider diverse language experiences, cultural differences in language acquisition, style, and practices, etc. I learned how diversity of linguistic experience is important to recognize from both a practical standpoint (in creating assessments, interventions, legislative decisions) and a theoretical standpoint (understanding the limits of the universality of language and acknowledging the informative value of differences from the [perceived] norm).</p>
	<p>Nice to learn about Nicaragua Sign Language history, speakers, and implications. Professor Flaherty knows so much about non-Western studies.</p>
<p>Total responses to question</p>	<p>5/5</p>

4 How might something you've learned in the course be applied to an issue that is currently of concern to society?

Respondent	Response
	<p>A lot of what we've learned in this course can be applied to various issues that are currently of concern; particularly issues regarding education policy and the type of input that is necessary for language development. In addition to the specific details of language acquisition that we discussed, this course also highlighted how some findings from these types of studies blow up in the greater media and can have detrimental effects or inspire ill-informed interventions, so this class brought up the issue of responsible and effective dissemination of academic information to the bodies that will use it (i.e. parents, teachers, policy makers...).</p>
	<p>Understanding how children learn to read and write can help facilitate more effective teaching, particularly in schools with few resources.</p>
	<p>Discussions on SES, various educational policies and programs, and issues related to language access were all very pertinent to larger societal issues. Additionally, knowing about children's language is honestly helpful in a wide variety of situations when you come into contact with children or parents.</p>
	<p>We learned a lot about ways in which empirical research can inform educational and medical practice. We learned the importance of having access to language from the very beginning, which is relevant to recommendations given to hearing parents of deaf children. We learned about the importance of phonological awareness in learning to read, and how different teaching styles lead to different outcomes for children beginning at different levels.</p>
	<p>The readings had some implications for education policies and practices</p>
<p>Total responses to question</p>	<p>5/5</p>

5 Do you think this course will affect your life beyond Swarthmore? If so, in what ways? Please elaborate.

Respondent	Response
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Respondent	Response
	Yes, this course made me more sure of my plans for the future, and exposed me to new areas and questions in language development that I'm interested in learning more about going forward.
	Yes. It has shown me how much I want to work with children and how capable they are. I look forward to taking this perspective with me as I continue my education and eventual career.
	This course helped confirm the career path I already suspected I wanted.
	This course gave me more confidence in my desire to pursue research in this area.
	It wasn't drastically life-changing or anything, but definitely good to have incorporated more knowledge and readings
Total responses to question	5/5

6 How many hours per week did you spend reading/studying/working on assignments/reviewing material for this course outside of class time? How does this compare with the amount of time you spend on other classes?

Respondent	Response
	I spent around 8-15 hours per week depending on the lengths of the readings and whether or not I was presenting on a given week. The reading load was often much heavier the week before presenting when we had to read ahead for our presentation week in addition to the current week's readings. This was more than I spent on other classes this semester, but that is also a reflection of the nature of these classes; this class was an honors seminar while most of my other classes were lower level classes.
	I spent at least 3 hours per week on the textbook chapter, but there were definitely weeks where it took 4. Papers took anywhere between 1-2 hours, but if they were over 15 pages definitely 2. Writing CTQs also took ~1.5 hours. So this probably averages to about 10 hours per week. I also spent at least an hour before every class reviewing the material so I'd be prepared to engage in discussion, so that brings it to 11 hours a week. This is notably more work outside of class than I have in other classes. While I think it's appropriate for a class of this level to have more work than lower level courses, it was often a very stressful experience that got in the way of enjoying the material.
	I spent 12-17 hours a week on this course depending on whether I was presenting or not. This was similar to other Honors seminars or high-pressure classes and more than an "average" class.
	I probably spent 10-14 hours per week, which is appropriate for a seminar but on the higher end.
	6-9
	Same
Total responses to question	5/5

7 What was your favorite reading and why?

Respondent	Response
	I really loved the Petitto paper, I thought it was fascinating material-wise and raised interesting questions for the in class discussion. I also really liked the Shneidman and Goldin-Meadow paper from Interaction and Input; the findings were interesting, but it also very clearly demonstrated how different cultures have different input situations and looked at how this influences the children's language development, as well as showing how researchers' presence and particular data collection method can influence how people from different cultures behave in an observation setting.
	I really liked Standler and Ward's (2005) paper because it had direct implications for what we can do to help children read. Often studies propose theories, future research, etc., so to see a paper that takes empirically supported findings and make them readily applicable to help children was very interesting. I would have really liked to see more papers like this throughout the course.
	<p>Mayberry, Chen, Witcher, & Klein, 2011: Very interesting work, not too long or overly complex</p> <p>Singh et al., 2011: A good length and brought up a lot of interesting issues with an unusual paradigm</p> <p>Petitto et al., 2004: Very interesting, discussed larger linguistic implications, I felt I learned a lot from it</p>
	<p>Petitto et al., 2004 by far! It raised a lot of super interesting questions relating to modality differences/similarities, the origins of language, scientific methodologies...</p> <p>Also, I think every student interested in this field should have the Syntactic Development debate that we had, so it was worthwhile.</p>
	Bilingualism unit, Language and Cognition unit - really interesting debates
Total responses to question	5/5

8 What was your least favorite reading and why?

Respondent	Response
	The syntactic development readings were a bit tough to get through. I thought this was a really important week, and the set up of having opposing papers to highlight the debate was great; I thought our discussion about this debate and how it plays out in the larger field was one of the most useful conversations that we had during the class. But the first Tomasello paper was very long, and as some people pointed out in class, the amount of space given to his side over Fisher's was very skewed. I didn't dislike the readings for the pragmatics/discourse week, but I wish they had touched on some other aspects of pragmatic development. I also wish the multilingual development week had more.
	I really did not enjoy Tomasello's (2000) paper. I thought it was overly drawn out, argumentative, and not well organized. I also didn't necessarily enjoy the other papers for this week either, but Tomasello's original publication was very difficult to get through.

Respondent	Response
Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2008: Felt problematic on multiple levels and didn't get into much discussion due to length constraints	
Syntactic Development readings: They were very long and although it was nice to get an idea of what "debate" looks like in this topic especially, it did feel biased in favor of the constructivist argument as they got significantly more space	
Anggoro, Waxman, & Medin, 2008: Uninteresting and didn't contribute much to learning	
Place & Hoff, 2011: It felt like it spent a ton of time on statistics and I got all the discussion out of it in a few sentences. The topic was interesting but the paper was just focused largely on the interactions between variables and their numbers instead of the implications of the variables	
	Place & Hoff, 2011 (from multilingual development).
	McDonough, 2002 (lexical development).
	Anggoro et al., 2008 (language and cognition).
	I just felt that better papers could be found to replace these.
	Language emergence and change unit - they were kinda boring
Total responses to question	5/5

9

Please reflect on Professor Flaherty's facilitation of student participation in class. What worked well? What didn't?

Respondent	Response
	Professor Flaherty's facilitation of student participation I felt primarily came from how she helped the student presenters structure their discussions and activities in the meetings we had previous to leading discussion. After the first few weeks, we all began to pick up on the strategies that were working, e.g. letting people discuss in partners or groups before contributing to the whole group, allowing time to look back at papers to form answers, giving targeted activities rather than always having very open ended questions. She made the task of leading discussion for the entire class period (something that I think we all learned could be very difficult) much more manageable by helping us prepare for it beforehand.
	Molly was good at jumping in when discussion lulled and redirecting our focus/pushing us to think more deeply about a given topic. One suggestion I have would be to do this more often, especially in the first 1/3 of the course. It was often rather daunting to offer our opinions in the beginning, so I think more active participation on Molly's part would be very helpful.
	I enjoyed it when Professor Flaherty joined in discussions or prompted people when things were quiet. She also gave good advice for eliciting participation during presentations.
	You gave helpful tips to presenters on how to elicit discussion, and making students submit CTQs was a good way for presenters to have material and field questions from different people. I think you opened up a little bit to providing your input in later weeks which I thought was helpful.

Respondent	Response
	<p>I loved how knowledgeable, friendly, responsive, caring, and organized Professor Flaherty is. She is a fantastic addition to the faculty and I hope she will stay at Swarthmore forever.</p> <p>I wish there was more room and time for whole-class open discussion that goes with the flow, rather than only talking about the questions that the presenters put on the slides for a specific amount of time. It would be nice if Professor Flaherty would be more involved in facilitating and balancing participation, but I understand if she is rather preparing us for how grad school works by holding herself back</p>
Total responses to question	5/5

10 What would you say to a fellow student considering taking this class in the future?

Respondent	Response
	<p>This is a great class, it can be a lot of work, but if you put effort into it you will get a lot out of it.</p>
	<p>I would recommend it because the material is really interesting, but I would caution them about the time commitment it entails. Had I known this course would be so time intensive, I would have changed other areas in my schedule or selected different classes to accommodate it or considered other class options if this was not possible.</p>
	<p>I would tell them to read the papers carefully and analytically, because I never found my CTQs in abstracts. I would also tell them to expect a lot of participation and not to take it if they wanted to learn through lectures.</p>
	<p>I would highly recommend it! I would advise them to do their readings as soon as possible since they can catch up to you really quickly (especially when reading double in preparation for an upcoming presentation).</p>
	<p>It's probably normal that doing all the readings will take many hours every week, and cannot be completed in one sitting. Same for writing CTQs--even if they are just a few sentences long, sometimes it just does take many hours to formulate good questions</p>
Total responses to question	5/5

11 What recommendations would you give me as I prepare to teach this class again next year?

Respondent	Response
	<p>The thought exercises were often some of the best discussion questions we were given, and I would have liked to hear what my classmates had to say about those topics. Also perhaps having another milestone for the final project before having the presentation would have been helpful; I (and I'm sure many of my other classmates) did not have time to work on our presentations up until a few days before we gave them, and we were essentially crafting the entire outline/argument for our papers in those couple days. So maybe having some sort of rough outline with a thesis due after the annotated bibliography that we could run by you would help motivate us to start thinking more critically about what our paper would actually be saying would help. The paper was a really fun assignment though, I liked getting to look further into a topic that I was interested in.</p>

Respondent**Response**

Having a mid-semester grade check-in would be helpful. I have no idea how I'm doing in this class because we've only had one graded assignment thus far and am very nervous about it. Giving students some type of heads up about where they fall would be great, and possibly feedback about how they can improve so they don't feel it's too late by the time the end of the semester comes.

I think the final project could have been broken down better. Most seminars either (a) use the presentation as a very informal way of discussing one's topic with the class and getting advice, or (b) only have a final presentation, no paper. I prefer either of these styles as the way it was in this class meant I spent a great deal of time on my presentation, and now will have to go spend many many more hours on the paper. The research for the presentation will obviously help on the paper, but it's still at best a glorified outline.

I think the three presentations/CTQs could still be improved because so much of the presentation was spent rehashing readings everyone in the class had done. I believe encouraging people to bring in outside studies into their presentations or CTQs would have helped me get a lot more out of class time. I enjoyed discussions and activities, but rarely found the summary sections helpful; I wouldn't recommend just getting rid of summary, however, because there's no way I could have ever filled a 2.5 hour class with just discussion and activities. So adding summary of new papers or CTQs with info on new papers could have been a nice addition.

Personally, the time for the thought exercises went too fast and I wasn't really able to get out good thoughts a lot of the time - but maybe that means I need training in engaging in critical thought quickly. Nonetheless, I think I would've benefited more if we received the thought exercise prompt before class and then spent those 15 minutes discussing our responses as a class just to get discussion warmed up.

I would have preferred to combine the data analysis project and final paper into a single end-of-semester project, where we first do a literature review on a topic and then do a data analysis project to address some question arising from that review.

I think incremental deadlines are great and if anything you should do more! Instead of asking for just the topic, maybe ask for a rough, basic outline. We can all use a bit of a push to get things started, and asking for an outline helpfully requires students to just commit to an idea instead of carefully considering different ideas for forever (and making little progress) like I tend to do.

I think you should also advise students at the beginning to connect CTQs to broader topics of interest or (briefly) read a related but not-assigned paper and make questions based on that - sometimes the class's CTQs got too bogged down in details, overlapped too much, or posed somewhat unanswerable questions.

Overall, I feel like I learned a ton this semester and think very highly of the class. Thank you!

I wish the class was less formal. The class was great, but the highly-structured atmosphere was much colder and more stressful than the other psych seminars that I've taken

Total
responses to
question

5/5

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