The idea: Poverty is bad for people and it is particularly bad for children. There is a large body of research documenting the negative effect of poverty on children’s physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development. The focus of this seminar is on how poverty affects children’s linguistic development. In recent years, research on poverty and language has focused on the “word gap,” the oft-cited observation from Hart and Risley (1995) that by age 3, children growing up in poverty have been exposed to 30 million fewer words than their peers growing up in upper-middle class families. This word gap has been shown to be directly related to smaller vocabularies and slower rates of vocabulary growth. The word gap is now considered a public health problem and a variety of interventions have been proposed to combat it. However, vocabulary acquisition is a very small part of language development more generally and there are many other interactions between language development and poverty that have received much less attention. The purpose of this seminar is to explore some of these other relationships between language and poverty. The purpose of this seminar is to explore some of these other relationships between language and poverty, especially as they relate to the complex relation among experience, cognitive development and the acquisition of grammar.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND GRADES

1. Class participation (10%): Do the assigned readings and come to class prepared to talk about them.

2. Discussion leaders (20%, 2 x 10%): Each student is responsible for leading the discussion on two of the class days. These responsibilities may be shared among two students, depending on the number of attendees.

3. Reaction papers (25%, 5 x 5%): Write 5 reaction papers based on the assigned readings. You are free to choose which weeks you will write your reaction papers, given your own time constraints. We do not want just a summary of the articles you read. Rather, we want any thoughts or questions that you came up with while doing the reading; this will help prepare for discussion in class. Ideally, these papers should synthesize across the readings for the day, although that is not an absolute requirement. Reaction papers should be turned submitted online by the Sunday night 6 PM immediately before the date that the readings will be discussed.

4. Experiment proposal (45%): You will write an experiment proposal in which you identify a particular phenomenon related to both language acquisition and poverty and describe a) what is known about it, b) what is not known about it, and c) how you would investigate the
open questions. An ideal paper will include a specific aims (1 page, see template), a literature review, and a detailed proposal (including Methods, Analysis, and hypothetical Results) for investigating that phenomenon. To help you along, there will be several due dates along the way.

**Week 7, Oct. 16. Phenomenon chosen.** Submit a brief description of the phenomenon you propose to investigate and motivate why this relates to both language acquisition and poverty.

**Week 9, Oct. 30. Flash presentation, specific aims, and annotated bibliography.** The flash presentation should be a 5-10 minute presentation that describes the phenomenon, why it is interesting, and how it relates to both language acquisition and poverty. The annotated bibliography should be a list of 6-12 papers that you believe are relevant to your question, with some notes about the main findings/claims of the papers. We will provide a template for your specific aims.

**Weeks 13-15, Nov. 27, Dec. 4, and Dec. 11. Class presentations.** Your presentation should be about 20-30 minutes. It should articulate the problem you are addressing and the work you are proposing to do. Please prepare a presentation that will be interesting and stimulate class discussion.

**Week 16, Dec. 15. Final papers due**

**Policies**
*Accommodations for students with disabilities or special needs:* If you have special needs with regards to this class, please contact me as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged.

*Academic Honesty:* All students are expected to adhere to campus policy on academic integrity. Cheating on academic work will not be tolerated in any form, and will be subject to strong penalties in this class and the university system. If you cheat on a paper or assignment, you risk failing the class, as well as suspension or expulsion from the University as a whole.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own, falsifying any information in a citation or academic exercise, using unauthorized materials in any academic exercise, or helping (or attempting to help) another to commit an act of academic dishonesty. You are expected to work independently on your papers.

**Articles:** All articles for the class are available as links in the syllabus or else on the course ELMS/BLACKBOARD website

(1) **Aug. 28: How to think about the acquisition of syntax, cognitive consequences of poverty, and the interaction between language acquisition and poverty**


**Optional:**

(2) Sept. 11: More thinking about poverty and its consequences of poverty in early childhood.


(3) Sept. 18: Mainstream/standard vs. non-mainstream/non-standard dialects and other issues. How do we measure dialect density? How do we differentiate non-mainstream dialect use from language disorder?


(background reading on non-mainstream dialect)


(background reading on African American English)


(4) Sept 25: The relations among cognitive control, language acquisition, and poverty


(4) Oct. 2: Parsing and Learning

Optional:

(5) Oct. 9: Quantity and quality in learning sounds and words

Optional:

(6) Oct. 16: Effects of Child directed speech on the acquisition of syntax
Valian, V. & Casey, L. (2003). Young children’s acquisition of wh-questions: The role of
structured input. *Journal of Child Language*, 30, 117-144.


**Optional**


(7) **Oct. 23: How input matters in morphosyntax**


(8) **Oct. 23: Non-mainstream dialect and language development: Morphosyntactic acquisition**


Green, L. (2017). All Zeros Are Not Equal, Plenary presentation at the 2017 Georgetown University Round Table in Linguistics, 10-12 March, Washington DC.


(9) **Oct. 30: Flash presentations of research topic**

(10) **Nov. 6: Non-mainstream dialect and language development: Morphosyntactic acquisition**


Green, L. (2017). All Zeros Are Not Equal, Plenary presentation at the 2017 Georgetown University Round Table in Linguistics, 10-12 March, Washington DC.


(11) Nov. 13: Non-mainstream dialect and language development: Phonological acquisition


(12) Nov. 20: Dialect mismatch and the acquisition of literacy


Optional:


(13) Nov. 27: Bilingual language development: Cognitive advantage? Linguistic disadvantage? Different trajectories of development


(13 – 15) Dec. 4, and Dec. 11: Student research presentations