

9.56/24.907 Paper Topics

The paper should represent an opportunity for you to read outside of the class material and gain a deeper understanding of abnormal language. The end result should be a paper that contributes something novel to the field. That is, we are not looking for literature reviews alone. While the papers should review what is known in the relevant area, we are looking for critical analysis and theory generation. All papers should offer a critique of the relevant literature and attempt to unify disparate results, proposing how theories could be tested and what types of results would help in deciding between competing alternatives. We can imagine papers in the following four styles, but are open to other ideas.

I. Further Areas

Due to time constraints, we were not able to discuss many other areas of abnormal language. You may review what is known in one such area, and propose a theory to account for the data if enough data is available. If relevant data is lacking, you may propose a research program outlining how such data might be acquired. Based on what is known, make predictions about what linguistic problems should be expected. Some areas to consider include:

Language savants
Cerebellar patients
Left-handed individuals (i.e. RH language)
Late-talkers
Individuals with low IQ
Demented patients (e.g. Alzheimer's)

II. Linguistic Inquiry

The course focuses on three areas of grammatical knowledge: finiteness, binding theory, and A-movement. While these areas have been the best studied, other areas have also been probed. Papers reviewing problems with other linguistic phenomena in a single abnormal population would be acceptable. In addition to reviewing what is known about the linguistic phenomena in the population of interest, ties should be made to whether these data match or refute existing theories of the disorder. A good place to start would be to review what is known about the linguistic phenomenon in L1. Some areas to consider include:

Determiners
Null subjects
Individual vs. stage level predicates
Unaccusativity
Clitics
Inversion

III. Biology

Can any strong claims be made about the localization of linguistic knowledge in the brain? A review of the neuroimaging literature, patient literature, and material discussed in the course, leading to specific claims about the linguistic processes carried out by a certain area of the brain would be acceptable. Such a paper should review what is known about the candidate area with respect to language processing, propose a theory of what role the area plays in such computations, and include ideas about what data should be sought to help determine the validity of the theory. Some areas to consider include:

Basal ganglia
Broca's area (LH)
Broca's area homologue (RH)
Cerebellum

IV. CHILES

For those interested in conducting their own research, and especially for those who speak another language, you might consider undertaking an analysis of natural production data. A paper in this area would require examining speech transcripts for evidence of certain linguistic phenomena. Predictions should be made based on the material discussed in the course. The relationship of the predictions to the data should be thoroughly discussed. The CHILDES database (<http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/>) contains transcript files for the following languages and disorders.

Castilian (SLI)
Dutch (SLI, DS, hearing impaired)
English (SLI, perinatal brain injury- twins, autism, DS, cocaine, WS)
French (SLI)
Hebrew (Fragile X)
Spanish (SLI, WS)

V. Other

If you have another idea for a paper, please come see us soon.

Length

Undergraduates: 10-12 pages + references
Graduates: 15-18 pages + references

Double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font, 1" margins

Important Dates

October 20th (10-12), 22nd (12-2), 26th (3-5)

We will meet with each student for 15 minute meetings to discuss paper topics.
Bring to the meeting a one paragraph description of what you would like to study.
Start scheduling a meeting time as soon as possible.

November 16th

Turn in 1-2 page write-up of initial findings, with a short discussion of where the paper is going.

December 2nd

Papers are due in class, by the beginning of class.

Journals

Behavioral and Brain Sciences

Brain and Language

Cognition

Language

Language Acquisition

Language and Cognitive Processes

Journal of Child Language

Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience

Journal of Neurolinguistics

Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research

Neuropsychologia

Neuropsychology

Trends in Cognitive Sciences

Resources

Google

PubMed

Science Citation Index