

Sample Paper Proposal

ENGL 3373/Dr. Min-Joo Kim

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## **Comparing Two Competing Theories of First Language Acquisition**

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In my final paper, I aim to compare two competing theories of children's first language acquisition, with particular reference to acquisition of syntactic categories (i.e., what are known as "parts of speech"). In so doing, I hope to form an informed opinion about this important phenomenon, thereby better equipping myself to become a more qualified English language arts teacher at the secondary level.

The two theories to be compared in this paper are Nina Hyams' maturation-based theory of first language acquisition and Paul Bloom's processing-based theory thereof, and the two theories differ from each other in the following ways: Taking the position of Chomskyan Generative Grammar, which is the standard theory in linguistics, Hyams (2010) holds that every human being is born with a special device with which to learn a language and yet they cannot fully master the grammar of any language without having gone through a proper maturation process. Coming from the psychologist's standpoint, on the other hand, Bloom (2002) claims that what makes humans' language learning possible is their information processing capacities and while this ability itself is special, it does not make language learning itself special; language learning just occurs as part of the general cognitive processing that humans (have to) do anyway.

In addition to comparing the two theories as I have briefly done here, I also plan to evaluate them against the empirical observations I have made about young children's language

acquisition by watching kids in the daycare facility I work at. In particular, I intend to find out whether children's acquisition of new words exhibits any general pattern and if so, whether they mostly rely on the syntax or they also rely on the semantic and/or morphological properties of the words at hand. I hope that the findings I report in my paper will serve as an important basis for my future research, as I plan to continue working on this topic even after graduation.

**References (to be expanded in the final paper):**

Ambridge, Ben. 2009. Review of "Language and the learning curve: A new theory of syntactic Development". *Infant and Child Development* 18: 102-104.

Behrens, Heike. 2006. The input-output relationship in first language acquisition. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 21: 2-24.

Bloom, Paul. 2002. Mindreading, communication and the learning of names for things. *Mind & Language* 17: 37-54.

Hyams, Nina. 2008. The acquisition of inflection: A parameter-setting approach. *Language Acquisition: A Journal of Developmental Linguistics* 15: 192-209.