

## IASCL - Child Language Bulletin - Vol 27, No 1: July 2007

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### IMPORTANT DATES FOR NEXT YEAR'S IASCL CONGRESS IN EDINBURGH

- Deadline for submissions: October 15th, 2007
- Notification of acceptance: February 2008
- Early Registration: March 2008
- IASCL 2008 Conference: Monday, July 28th – Friday, August 1st
- IASCL Business Meeting: Thursday, July 31st
- Workshop Advances in CHILDES for Phonological, Morphosyntactic, and Multimedia Analysis -- Brian MacWhinney and Yvan Rose: Wednesday, July 30th

Please note the change made in the format of conference presentations in response to feedback from the previous conference in Berlin. The 2008 conference will consist of symposia presentations and independent poster sessions only. There will be **no independent paper presentations**.

For more information, visit <http://www.in-conference.org.uk/IASCL/>.

As promised in the last issue of the Bulletin, contributors to this issue received Anat Ninio's book, *Language and the Learning Curve: A New Theory of Syntactic Development*, courtesy of Oxford University Press. A copy of the book has been sent to Brian MacWhinney for his update on CHILDES and Eileen Graf for her review of Anat Ninio's book. I would like to thank them both for their contributions!

### AN UPDATE ON CHILDES



Brian MacWhinney

Brian MacWhinney,  
*Carnegie Mellon University*

The following is an update on recent developments in the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) Project. I will assume that, although most readers are basically familiar with CHILDES, they are unable to follow every new development. So, it may be helpful to review some of the major changes of the last two or three years.

In 2004, NIH-NICHHD provided the CHILDES Project with five additional years of funding, bringing the total period of NIH support now to 24 years. Over these 24 years, with the help of hundreds of child language researchers, we have been able to compile an enormous database of transcripts of naturalistic interactions between children and their caretakers. Apart from the continuing growth of the database in terms of coverage and depth, we have also worked to improve the database in terms of consistency, quality, and accessibility. At the same time, Leonid Spektor has worked to improve and extend the ways in which researchers can analyze the data using CLAN and other programs. In addition to support for the basic CHILDES system, we have also received additional NICHHD funding for the development of a database and programs designed specifically for the analysis of data on phonological development. This new project is called PhonBank and it involves collaboration between Yvan Rose at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the CHILDES center at Carnegie Mellon. In the next sections, I will review progress and new developments across these various fronts. My goal here is to make sure that child language researchers are aware of the many new tools that have been developed and the new ways in which data can be accessed.

### **New corpora**

When new corpora are added to CHILDES, the additions are announced to the community through the [info-childes@mail.talkbank.org](mailto:childes@mail.talkbank.org) mailing list. Over the last 12 months, we have added 16 new corpora. In each case,

the new corpora are checked for conformity to the CHAT coding system by running the CHECK program, as well as a further consistency check imposed by our XML converter. These checks guarantee that codes have the same meaning across corpora. There are two good ways to keep track of these various ongoing changes in the database. The first is to simply browse the database collection at <https://childes.talkbank.org/data>. For more detailed information, the best method is to read the database manuals collected at <https://childes.talkbank.org/manuals>.

You can download these manuals and open them in Microsoft Word. At the beginning of each database manual, you will find a table with “hot links” that can be clicked to take you to the description of each individual corpus.

### **Using corpora with media**

Many of the new corpora are also linked to audio or video media. In most cases, the contributors of the corpora added the media links using the CLAN editor. In order to determine whether or not media are available for a given corpus, you can go look at the descriptions for corpora found in the manuals at <https://childes.talkbank.org/manuals>. However, it may be even easier to just go to <https://childes.talkbank.org/media> on the web and browse through the relevant directories. If a corpus has media, you will see the media files in these folders. For video recordings, the format is QuickTime .mov. For audio files, there will be .mp3 files at the top level, and .wav files in a subdirectory. The MP3 files are intended for easy downloading and general listening. The WAVE files are intended for researchers wanting to conduct phonological analysis.

Downloading large quantities of media from the web can be tedious and inefficient. As an alternative, you can use CLAN’s new WebData facility to playback from our servers while you are connected to the web. As long as you have a good broadband connection, the playback of audio media seems to work well from all parts of the globe. To try this out, follow these steps:

1. Make sure you are connected to the web.
2. Open up CLAN
3. Select “WebData” under the “Windows” menu
4. Double click on “CHILDES”
5. Double click on Eng-USA, then MacWhinney, and then boys28.cha
6. When the file opens, place your cursor on the first line of the file and then type escape-8.
7. A QuickTime sound window will open and the audio will start to play back, while the corresponding text is highlighted.
8. To stop playback, click once in the transcript window.
9. To play again, use escape-8 again. Or to play a single line, just click on the line and type F4.

This form of web-based playback is particularly useful for exploration of features of interactions. It represents an interesting alternative to analyses that focus on counting and inventories. Instead of yielding numbers, it allows you to develop perspectives that focus on the interaction and children's specific means of expression.

### **Morphosyntactic Analysis**

In 2003, we began to apply the morphological analyzer for English to all of the English corpora in the database. This work was completed in 2004. Now, we have also completed automatic morphological analysis for many of the corpora in Cantonese, Chinese, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish. To give an example of the results of these analyses for English, consider this sentence from eve15.cha in Roger Brown's corpus for Eve.

\*CHI: oop I spilled it .

%mor: int|oop pro|I v|spill-PAST pro|it .

Here, the main line gives the child's production and the %mor line gives the part of speech for each word, along with the morphological analysis of affixes, such as the third singular suffix of the verb. The %mor lines in these files were not created by hand. To produce them, we ran the MOR program, using the MOR grammar for English. After running MOR, the file looks like this:

\*CHI: oop I spilled it .

%mor: int|oop pro|I part|spill-PERF^v|spill-PAST pro|it .

Notice that the word "spilled" is initially ambiguous between the past tense and participle readings. To resolve such ambiguities, we run a program called POST. After POST has been run, the sentence is then "disambiguated." Using this disambiguated form, we can then run a third set of programs, called GRASP to create the representation given in the %xsyn line below:

\*CHI: oop I spilled it .

%mor: int|oop pro|I v|spill-PAST pro|it . %xsyn: 1|3|JCT 2|3|SUBJ 3|0|ROOT 4|3|OBJ 5|3|PUNCT

In this %xsyn line, we see that the second word "I" is related to the verb ("spilled") through the grammatical relation (GR) of Subject. The fourth word "it" is related to the verb through the grammatical relation of Object. Using GRASP, we have now produced full dependency grammar tags for all of these grammatical relations in the Eve corpus. These GR tags are completely accurate for 94% of the sentences. For the remaining 6%, one or more GR tags may be wrong.

The work of building MOR, POST, and GRASP has been supported by a number of people. Mitzi Morris built MOR in 1997, using design specifications from Roland Hausser. Christophe Parisse (2000) built POST and POSTTRAIN and continues to maintain and refine them. Kenji Sagae built GRASP as a part of his dissertation

work in the Language Technologies Institute at Carnegie Mellon University (Sagae, MacWhinney, & Lavie, 2004a, 2004b). GRASP was then applied in detail to the Eve corpus by Eric Davis and Shuly Wintner.

Once a corpus has been fully analyzed for parts-of-speech and grammatical relations, it is possible to run a wide variety of further analyses. Some of these are as simple as using KWAL or COMBO on the %mor and %xsyn lines to look for certain parts of speech or grammatical configurations. Others may involve fuller analyses. For example, Sagae (2005) used the output of GRASP to automatically compute the IPSyn (Index of Productive Syntax) measure developed by Scarborough (1990). Sagae's method was able to match the accuracy levels achieved by the best human coders using IPSyn.

### **Building MOR, POST, and GRASP**

The building of new systems for morphosyntactic analysis of CHILDES data involves construction of several systems. Although these systems involve complex linguistic analysis and organization, they do not require programming. In a forthcoming article in the TILAR series, I will explain in detail the process of grammar construction through MOR, POST, and GRASP. However, it may be useful here to give a sense of some of the relevant steps, so that users can better understand how to extend the grammars when processing new corpora.

First, it is important to realize that, when you come to analyzing a new corpus with MOR, it is likely that many words will not be recognized. The unrecognized words can be spotted quite quickly by running this command: `mor +xl *.cha` This command will go through a collection of files and output a single file "mini lexicon" of unrecognized words. The output is given the name of the first file in the collection. After this command finishes, open up the file and you will see all the words not recognized by MOR. There are usually several major reasons for a word not being recognized:

1. It is misspelled.
2. The word should really be marked with additional features that will block look up in MOR. For example, incomplete words should be transcribed as `&text` so that the ampersand character can block MOR look up. Or sounds like laughing can be transcribed as `&=laughs` to achieve the same effect.
3. The word should have been transcribed with a special form marker, as in `bobo@o` for onomatopoeia. It is impossible to list all possible onomatopoeic forms in the MOR lexicon, so the `@o` marker solves this problem by telling MOR how to treat the form.
4. The word was transcribed in "eye-dialect" to represent phonological reductions. When this is done, there are two basic ways to allow MOR to achieve correct lookup. If the word can be transcribed with parentheses for the missing material, as in `(be)cause`, then MOR will be happy. This method is particularly useful in Spanish and German. Alternatively, if there is a sound substitution, then you can transcribe using the `[ : text ]` replacement method, as in `pittie [ : kittie ]`.

5. You really needed to treat the word as a proper noun by capitalizing the first letter. This method works for many languages, but not in German where all nouns are capitalized and not in Asian languages, since those languages do not have systems for capitalization.
6. The word should be treated as a compound. The issue of how to represent compounds is a complex one that I will discuss in the forthcoming TILAR chapter.
7. The stem is in MOR, but the inflected form is not recognized. In this case, it is possible that one of the analytic rules of MOR is not working. These problems can be [reported to me](#) at macw@cmu.edu.
8. The stem or word is missing from MOR. In that case, you can create a file called something like 0add.cut in the /lex folder of the MOR grammar. Once you have accumulated a collection of such words, you can email them to me for permanent addition to the lexicon.

Once you have succeeded in reducing the context of the minilex to zero, you are ready to run a final pass of MOR. After that, if there is a .db file in the MOR grammar for your language, you can run POST to disambiguate your file. After disambiguation, you should run CHECK again. There may be some errors if POST was not able to disambiguate everything. In that case, you would either need to fix MOR or else just use CLAN's disambiguate tier function (escape-2) to finish the final stages of disambiguation.

After finishing MOR and POST, you may want to try to run GRASP to compute grammatical relations. To run GRASP, you will need to compile the program under Unix. Over the next months, we will be providing instructions on how to do this. Currently, GRASP processing is limited to English. However, researchers who are interested in computational linguistic analyses of grammatical development may wish to consider applying GRASP to other languages. We would be happy to work with colleagues on such extensions.

### **Video Analysis for Gesture and Sign**

Over the last three years, the video segments of the CHILDES database have been growing rapidly. Although we are not yet able to playback this video smoothly over the web, it is possible to download the video media and the related transcripts for playback over your local machine. Major corpora that are accompanied by video include: Forrester (British English), McCune (American English), YipMatthews (Cantonese-English), Ornat (Spanish), CRLSP (Thai), Ishii (Japanese), and Yasmin (Spanish with some English). Of these, only the McCune corpus is not yet fully linked to the video. Apart from these video analyses of child language, there is a growing collection of video analyses of classroom discourse with young children in the TalkBank database.

To provide further support for video analysis, we have created methods for linking the Elan program with CLAN. Elan is a program developed at the Max-Planck Institute in Nijmegen for the analysis of gesture. In order to make good use of Elan, we have been working with the gesture group organized by Sotaro Kita at Birmingham to transfer files from the earlier MediaTagger (MDT) program into CHAT format for eventual processing in Elan. The conversions from MDT to CHAT are now nearly completed and our initial framework for

converting from Elan to CHAT and from CHAT to Elan are also operative. We hope that this system will be useful not only for gesture analysis, but also for the study of sign language acquisition.

## PhonBank

Finally, I would like to review some exciting new work involving the creation of a system for studying phonological development within the larger framework of the CHILDES and TalkBank systems. This is the PhonBank project directed by Yvan Rose at Memorial University, Newfoundland and Brian MacWhinney at CMU. Like the CHILDES Project, the PhonBank Project involves both the construction of a new database and the building of computer programs to analyze this new data. The current version of the Phon program can be downloaded from the CHILDES web site at: <https://childes.talkbank.org/Phon/>. The version available at the time of this writing is still a development version. However, a fully functional version will be released sometime in the second half of 2007.

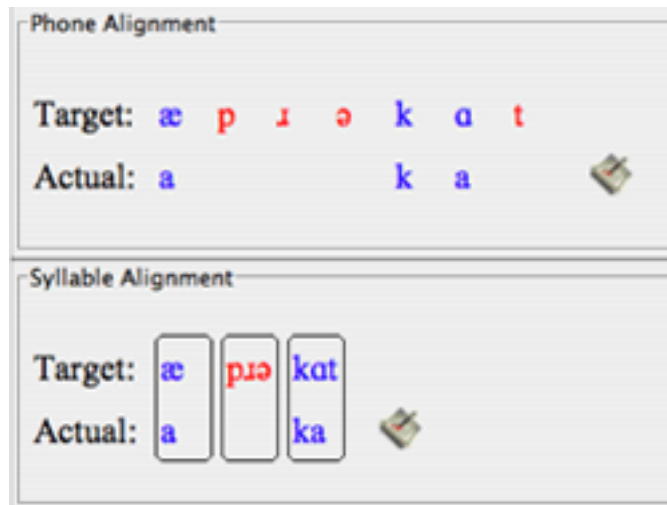
Phon is programmed in Java and runs on Macintosh, Windows, and Unix/Linux operating systems. Phon uses Unicode font encoding, which enables full data compatibility across these various platforms, an important condition for data sharing among researchers. Moreover, because it relies on the TalkBank XML data encoding schema, data transcribed in Phon are fully compatible with all other CLAN programs.

Phon is organized into eight inter-related modules. These modules include: user management, media segmentation, data transcription, transcription validation, utterance segmentation, automatic syllabification, automatic alignment, and database query. Once material has been entered in IPA format, the user must specify how it should be segmented. The following screenshot illustrates how alignment works at this level.

The screenshot shows the PhonBank interface with three main sections: Orthography, Target IPA, and Actual IPA. The Orthography section displays the text 'I love teddy bear' with 'I' in blue, 'love' in yellow, 'teddy' in blue, and 'bear' in yellow. The Target IPA section shows the phonetic transcription 'aɪ 'lʌv 'tedi:'beɪ' with 'aɪ' in blue, 'lʌv' in yellow, 'tedi:' in blue, and 'beɪ' in yellow. The Actual IPA section shows the transcription 'a 'lʌv 'debe' with 'a' in blue, 'lʌv' in yellow, and 'debe' in blue. A 'Reset' button is located below the IPA sections. At the bottom, a 'Phrases' table summarizes the alignment.

Orthography	IPA Target	IPA Actual
I	'aɪ	a
love	'lʌv	'lʌv
teddy bear	'tedi:'beɪ	'debe

Once this level of utterance alignment is determined, Phon is responsible for further automatic alignment of child segments to target segments, as illustrated here:



Since controversy exists in both phonetic and phonological theory regarding guidelines for syllabification, the algorithm is parameterized to allow for analytical flexibility. The availability of different parameter settings also enables the researcher to test hypotheses on which analysis makes the best prediction for a given dataset. Once corpora are aligned in this way, it is possible to conduct a wide variety of searches and inventory computations to track the development of phonological patterns and rules. Through a process of automatic linkage to Praat, it is also possible to supplement Phon encoding with detailed phonetic analysis.

Along with our work on the development of Phon, we are also busy developing a database that will be amenable to analysis from Phon. The Phon project received letters of support from 30 child phonologists in 8 different countries who have committed themselves to use of the program and addition of their data to the database. Currently, we are focusing on the addition of data contributed by Barbara Davis, Sophie Kern, Katherine Demuth, and Yvan Rose. To speed up the process of data entry, we are using professional digitization services to convert audio from older cassette, reel-to-reel, and DAT formats. At the same time, we are converting transcriptions from formats such as LIPP, Wordbase, and Excel.

### The Core XML Schema

As computer technology advances, we are able to provide increasingly powerful methods for analysis of language acquisition data. In order to make best use of this new power, it is important to provide increasingly tight specifications of transcription format. Underlying all of the activities described above, there is a well-defined XML characterization of the units of human language and its possible transcriptions. This XML format is basic to the CHILDES, TalkBank, and Phon projects, as well as to the related AphasiaBank project. In the long term, the scientific value of these projects resides both in the accumulation of data and in the specification of accurate methods for characterizing the shape of data on human language. The validity of both the programs and the data is grounded on the structural analysis specified in the TalkBank XML Schema (<http://talkbank.org/software/talkbank.xsd>), as further elaborated by the MOR lexicons. The accuracy of the relation of the Schema to the database is determined by running a process of validation across the entire



database. Through successful completion of this validation, we know that the database is indeed in conformity with the details specifications of the Schema.

## References

- Parisse, C., & Le Normand, M. T. (2000). Automatic disambiguation of the morphosyntax in spoken language corpora. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers*, 32, 468-481.
- Sagae, K., Lavie, A., & MacWhinney, B. (2005). Automatic measurement of syntactic development in child language. In *Proceedings of the 43rd Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (pp. 197-204). Ann Arbor: ACL.
- Sagae, K., MacWhinney, B., & Lavie, A. (2004a). Adding syntactic annotations to transcripts of parent-child dialogs. In *LREC 2004* (pp. 1815-1818). Lisbon: LREC.
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- Scarborough, H. S. (1990). Index of productive syntax. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 11, 1-22.

Brian MacWhinney is Professor of Psychology at [Carnegie Mellon University](#), co-founder of the CHILDES Project.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Ninio, Anat (2006). *Language and the Learning Curve: A New Theory of Syntactic Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.**



Eileen Graf

Eileen Graf

*University of Edinburgh*

Ninio draws together a substantial body of knowledge in an admirable attempt to combine current theories in language acquisition. While integrating linguistic as well as psychological theories into her own framework of syntactic development, she rigorously disposes of cherished notions in both traditions. Her ideas are thought-provoking and critical. Thus, her theory invites students in the field of language acquisition to critically assess its central tenets with relation to usage-based accounts of language as well as generative linguistics. A cautionary note to all students in theoretical linguistics: a background in statistics is required.

In the first chapter Ninio outlines the central ideas in the book. Adopting a minimalist perspective, Ninio posits that children acquire a lexicalist syntax, which entails syntactic structure being projected from the lexicon. The lexicon stores information regarding each verb's semantic as well as syntactic valency. Ninio argues that syntax is remarkably easy, as a language learner only has to learn the Merge/Dependency operation, which characterises adults' syntax and children's syntax alike.

In chapter two Ninio provides statistical analyses that indicate that children acquire valency frames on an individual basis, but that the acquisition of later frames is greatly facilitated by transfer effects and analogy. She specifically rejects the Verb Island hypothesis which holds that children do not generalise early in their syntactic development but rather form an isolated mini syntax for each verb in isolation. Ninio introduces the Power Law of Practice, which states that the speed of performance of a task increases as a power-law function of the number of times the task is performed. She provides data that children's verbal frames show an accelerating learning curve, suggesting that syntactic development is facilitated by transfer and generalisation from very early on – even though the acquisition process is at least partially item-based and lexically specific in the beginning.

Chapter three roots children's syntactic development in a lexicalist grammar, informed by minimalism. Ninio provides a theoretical overview of lexical semantics and concludes that children do not form abstract rules or schemas and do not resort to innate syntactic rules. Instead they form lexical-specific combinatory schemas in line with an adult syntax.

Chapter four discusses the notion of similarity and introduces Goal-Driven Learning, a psychological principle according to which a learner chooses features and dimensions of similarity that are most relevant to successful completion of the ongoing task. As the mapping from semantics to syntax and vice versa is argued to be too unpredictable, Ninio concludes that syntax is autonomous. The mapping from syntax to semantics only happens on an item-specific basis and the acquisition of new formulae is facilitated by a similarity of form.

The last chapter theorises that the nature of children's acquisition is best described by linking to the linguistic network. Children are supposed to be active users of the language network; users who exercise choice over what they want to say (and learn) are guided by the principle of Preferential Attachment. Children are thereby

guided by the same pragmatic principles as adults are. Ninio provides statistical evidence that children's language networks exhibit the same global statistic pattern as the maternal one.

Ninio's framework provides a large number of discussion points for the critical student reader, a few of these will be addressed below.

In chapter one, Ninio argues that evidence for children applying the Merge/Dependency operation proves that "children's syntactic rules represent the internalization of a crucial segment of the adult system" (p. 17). In her choice of terminology, Ninio here contradicts her line of reasoning. Her main argument is that children neither acquire any rules nor internalise them. They are also not equipped with innate rules. It is thus unclear what the nature of the Merge/Dependency operation is. Ninio posits that the principle is learned via input, "using general human cognitive abilities" (p. 31), however, she insists that "basic learning processes are alien in spirit to the conceptualisation of syntactic structure by theoretical linguistics" (p. 29). The entire chapter and hence Ninio's deconstruction of early multiword utterances as Merge/Dependency descriptions rest on this very notion. Terminological connotations such as this are unfortunately typical of Ninio's account. It is understood that an integrative approach is particularly prone to such fallacies, but it should therefore be all the more sensitive to definitional clarity.

In chapter three, Ninio concedes that children do indeed (over)generalise on a semantic basis, not early in their development, but from around the age of three. She dismisses this evidence, stating that it "belongs to a different developmental stage" (p. 103). Ninio, however, posits that developmental stages are difficult to account for when the effects of learning are cumulative. Of particular interest here is the involvement with usage-based accounts that hold that children start to generalise from around the age of 3 to 3;5, after a Verb Island stage. It would be interesting to know how (over)generalisation is to be accounted for in an approach that is defined by continuity. Or else, it might be enlightening to see whether what fit a power law function would show. Indeed, in chapter two Ninio reanalyses data which was originally used to argue for the Verb Island hypothesis. The children in question are not yet three years of age. It is imperative to show children's linguistic behaviour around the age of 3 to 3;5 to adequately address this part of a usage-based theory.

Chapter three starts with a brief history of Chomskian linguistics, explaining the abandonment of phrase structure rules and the intricacies of minimalism. This is very welcome by current students of linguistics who find themselves increasingly lost in the abundant follow ups, modifications and re-modifications of Chomsky's initial theory. Ninio makes her position very clear, which is invaluable for students odyssee-ing between different versions of the theory.

In the last chapter, Ninio evaluates the role of environment and refutes the idea that children reinvent syntax based on innate rules. She also dismisses the theory that children internalise syntax based on input, stating that the child is a passive learning machine. Especially the latter, she argues, "downplay the role of social

interaction in the acquisition process" (p. 120). This argument leaves the reader somewhat puzzled.

Throughout the entire book Ninio mainly argues against one particular framework, representative of field of usage-based linguistics. She makes a point reanalysing experimental data put forward in use of but fails to approach the theory in its entirety. In this very theory, "social interaction," as Ninio terms it, defines the nature of language (acquisition).

In conclusion, this is a fascinating volume that provides an intricate and stimulating read, recommended to everyone interested in integrative accounts of child language development.

*Eileen Graf, having received a prestigious DAAD - German Academic Exchange Service scholarship, is currently an MSc student in Language Evolution at the department of Linguistics and English Language at the University of Edinburgh. Prior to her arrival to Edinburgh, she worked as a research assistant in the Child Lab run by Mike Tomasello at the Department of Comparative and Developmental Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. In September she will be starting her PhD at the Max Planck Child Study Centre in Manchester.*

## **FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS**

**What: 30th Child Language Seminar (CLS)**

**When:** July 18-20

**Where:** University of Reading, England, UK

**Details:** <http://www.reading.ac.uk/cls/cls2007.html>

**Workshop at CogSci 2007**

**What: Psychocomputational Models of Human Language Acquisition (PsychoCompLA-2007)**

**When:** August 1

**Where:** Nashville, Tennessee, USA

**Details:** <http://www.colag.cs.hunter.cuny.edu/psychocomp/>

**What: XVI International Congress of Phonetic Sciences (ICPhS)**

**When:** August 6-10

**Where:** Saarbrücken, Germany

**Details:** <http://www.icphs2007.de/>

**What: British Psychological Society Developmental Conference**

**Where:** University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

*When:* August 29 -31

*Details:* <http://www.bpsdevsec07.org>

***What:* Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition (GALA) 2007**

*When:* September 6-8

*Where:* Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

*Details:* <http://www.gala2007.uab.es/>

**Workshop at the European Conference on Artificial Life (ECAL 2007)**

***What:* Workshop on the Emergence of Social Behaviour: From Cooperation to Language**

*Where:* Lisbon, Portugal

*When:* September 10

*Details:* <http://lis.epfl.ch/workshops/ECAL07>

***What:* The 32nd Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development (BUCLD)**

*When:* November 2-4

*Where:* Boston, MA, USA

*Details:* <http://www.bu.edu/linguistics/APPLIED/BUCLD/>

**Workshop for advanced MA and PhD students in first and second language acquisition**

***What:* Experimental Methods in Language Acquisition Research (EMLAR) IV**

*When:* November 6 -8, 2007

*Where:* Utrecht, the Netherlands

*Details:* <http://www.let.uu.nl/emlar/>

***What:* The First Conference of the Swedish Association for Language and Cognition (SALC)**

*When:* November 29 - December 1

*Where:* Lund, Sweden

*Details:* <http://www.salc-sssk.org/conference>

## **CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP CALLS**

***What:* Language, culture and mind 3: Social life and meaning construction**

*Submission deadline:* July 1

*Where:* Odense, Denmark

*When:* July 14-16, 2008

*Details:* <http://www.lcm.sdu.dk>

**What: Acquisition of African Languages 2008**

*Submission deadline:* July 30

*Where:* Stellenbosch University, Western Cape Province, South Africa

*When:* January 21-22, 2008

*Details:* <http://jeanerz.com/AAL2008>

**What: The 3rd International Symposium on Intercultural Communication and Pragmatics**

*Submission deadline:* July 30

*Where:* Stellenbosch University, Western Cape Province, South Africa

*When:* January 14-16, 2008

*Details:* <http://academic.sun.ac.za/iccling/>

**Workshop at the 30th Annual Meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprachwissenschaft (DGfS)**

**What: The role of phonology in reading acquisition.**

*Submission deadline:* July 31

*When:* February 28 - 29, 2008

*Where:* Bamberg, Germany

**What: XVI Biennial International Conference on Infant Studies (ICIS) 2008**

*Submission deadline:* September 30

*When:* March 27 - 29, 2008

*Where:* Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

*Details:* <http://www.isisweb.org/>

**What: XI International Congress for the Study of Child Language (IASCL)**

*Submission deadline:* October 15

*When:* July 28 - August 1, 2008

*Where:* Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

*Details:* <http://www.in-conference.org.uk/IASCL/>

**What: 1st Nordic Conference of Clinical Linguistics**

*Submission deadline:* December 3

*When:* February 9 - 10, 2008

*Where:* Joensuu, Finland

*Details:* <http://cc.joensuu.fi/linguistics/NorConfClinLing2008/>

**BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Author:** Tom Roeper

**Title:** The Prism of Grammar: How Child Language Illuminates Humanism

**Publisher:** MIT Press

**ISBN 10:** 0-262-18252-1

**ISBN 13:** 978-0-262-18252-2

**URL:** <http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=10968>

The book is intended for the broad acquisition community, professionals and amateurs, teachers and parents. It has around 60 explorations one can directly pursue with children. They cover topics in recursion, reference, ellipsis, and plurals. The book also addresses several issues in communication disorders, education, African American English, theory of mind, philosophy and ethics in psychology.

**Author:** Sharynne McLeod (editor)

**Title:** The International Guide to Speech Acquisition

**Publisher:** Thomson Delmar Learning

**ISBN 10:** 1418053600

**ISBN 13:** 9781418053604

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Ideal for speech-language pathologists working with children from a wide variety of language backgrounds, this comprehensive resource guide will allow them to identify children who are having speech difficulties, and provide age-appropriate prevention and intervention targets. The text has been carefully compiled to provide a description of many major English dialects, comparing them with General American English. It also contains comprehensive information about typical speech acquisition for over 20 other languages. This resource guide was written by over 70 recognized authorities from around the world.

### THESIS ANNOUNCEMENT

**Title:** Object Clitics And Null Objects In The Acquisition Of French

**Author:** Theres Grüter, McGill University

This dissertation investigates (direct) object clitics and object omission in the acquisition of French as a first language. It reports on two original empirical studies which were designed to address aspects of object omission in child French that have remained unexplored in previous research.

Study 1 investigates the incidence of object omission in the spontaneous speech of French-speaking children aged three and above, an age group for which no analysis, and only little data, have been available so far.

Findings show that object omission continues to occur at non-negligible rates in this group. A comparison with age- and language-matched groups of English- and Chinese-speaking children (from Wang, Lillo-Martin, Best and Levitt 1992) suggests that French-speaking children omit objects at higher rates than their English-speaking peers, yet at lower rates than children acquiring a true null object language, such as Chinese.

Study 2 was designed to investigate whether French-speaking children would accept null objects on a receptive task, an issue that has not been previously investigated. A series of truth value judgment experiments is developed, adapting an experimental paradigm that has not been used previously in the context of null objects. Results from English- and French-speaking children show that both groups consistently reject null objects on these tasks, a finding that constitutes counterevidence to proposals which attribute object omission in production to a genuine null object representation sanctioned by the child grammar.

Overall, the pattern of results turns out not to be consistent with any developmental proposals made in the literature, suggesting that a novel approach is required. Proposing a minimalist adaptation of Sportiche's (1996) analysis of clitic constructions, and taking into consideration the recent emphasis on 'interface' requirements imposed by language-external systems, I put forward a hypothesis for future research, the Decayed Features Hypothesis (DFH), which locates the source of object (clitic) omission in child French in a specific language-external domain, namely the capacity of working memory.

## **NEW CORPUS**

A new corpus of data in CHILDES on the acquisition of German, collected and transcribed by Rosemarie Rigol. Retranscription of the data into CHAT was supported by funds from the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig and was supervised by Heike Behrens. The corpus currently contains data from three children from birth until age 7 (the complete database includes recordings from 21 children). The files are linked to audio media. The earliest files begin after birth and the children are each followed at monthly or bimonthly intervals until age 7.

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

The Child Language Bulletin is the newsletter of the International Association for the Study of Child Language. It is distributed free to all members of IASCL and it is published twice a year. The Bulletin is available on the IASCL web-page at <http://iascl.talkbank.org> and all members of the association will receive an e-mail message each time a new issue of the Bulletin is published. A hard copy of the Bulletin will only be sent to those members who ask for it by sending a message to the editor.



I encourage members to submit news and information that might be relevant to our research community. I would especially like to hear from doctoral students on new theses being completed. They are often a wonderful source of new data and new ideas that are not always easily accessible before publication.

Please do send any items that are of interest to the IASCL community to the address below - electronic mail is the easiest and fastest way to get in touch.

I am looking forward to your submissions!

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## IASCL DONATION DRIVE

The IASCL is a worldwide organisation, which means that it aims to serve child language researchers in all countries of the world. Child language research is important everywhere, both from a theoretical perspective (cf. for instance the significance of cross-linguistic evidence) and from a more applied point of view (cf. for instance the need for good description to allow for the assessment of language learning problems). Unfortunately financial considerations are often a hindrance to the development of scientific disciplines in countries with severe economic problems. The IASCL has always been supportive of would-be IASCL members working in such countries by waiving membership fees for them.

IASCL funds are limited, though. In the past, donations from regular IASCL members have been very helpful in supporting colleagues from economically disadvantaged countries. In order to continue offering that support, your donations are very welcome indeed. Each donation, whatever the amount, will be acknowledged by a receipt signed by the IASCL Treasurer (useful perhaps for tax purposes). You may send donations in either pounds sterling or American dollars.

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The IASCL as a whole will be sure to benefit from the more diversified nature of its membership as a result of your donations. Many thanks in advance!

Anna Theakston, IASCL Treasurer  
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## **MEMBERSHIP**

Memberships normally EXPIRE at the beginning of each congress, and congress registration includes membership for the next three years. If you did not attend the Congress in Berlin in July 2005, you are invited to (re)join the IASCL for 2005-2008. In addition to the congresses, the IASCL produces the Child Language Bulletin twice a year, with directory information, book notices, interviews, a conference calendar, and other useful information. The Bulletin is included in the membership fee. Members will also receive a free copy of TiLAR5 and TiLAR6 as part of their membership. Members are also eligible for a substantial discount for the first four volumes of TiLAR, and for a reduced subscription fee to the following journals: Journal of Child Language, First Language, and the International Journal of Bilingualism.

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We look forward to hearing from you!

