

Investigations in Child Language

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Advances in our understanding of the nature of human languages have required corresponding advances in research methods to investigate child language. Modern linguistic theory has made far-reaching predictions about the course of language development, so children have become a critical testing ground for evaluating theoretical proposals. Among the most far-reaching predictions of linguistic theory is the claim that children around the globe draw upon a ‘Universal Grammar’ in the acquisition of language. In order to assess this claim, researchers in child language have developed new experimental techniques to determine what young children know about language. Because young children are not able to perform the kinds of psychological tasks that have been used to assess linguistic knowledge in adults, special techniques have been developed to assess children’s linguistic competence, including novel behavioural tests of comprehension and production, as well as novel brain imaging devices. This talk will present a brief (and personal) history of methodological advances in the study of child language, and will report some representative findings that bear on linguistic theory.