- **L1 acquisition of syntax**

Background reading:

- *CL* Ch 9, sec 5

1. Review — L1 acquisition key ideas

- A child who is in the process of acquiring his/her target (adult) language goes through different **stages** of development
  - These stages reflect **intermediate mental grammars** on the way to the adult grammar
- A child often shows **variable** behavior
  - A rule may be applied only some of the time
  - Multiple versions of a rule may be in use
- But we can still find a great deal of **systematicity** in children's language behavior

2. Syntactic development: Overview

- Syntactic development also proceeds in stages

- Examples:
  - Stages in utterance length
  - Stages in development of transformations

3. Development of utterances

The **one-word stage** (12 to 18 months)

- One-word utterances are used to express the meaning of a whole sentence
- Some examples from A (my daughter):

  More (‘I want more milk’)

  Foot (‘My foot is stuck’)

  Leaf (‘That’s a leaf’/’I see a leaf’)

  Mama (‘Mama should do it’)

  Note: Interpretations of the child’s intended meaning are based on the context of the utterance

3. Development of utterances

The **two-word stage** (a few months later)

- Words very often **lack inflection** at this stage
  - Sometimes, children treat adult phrases as words in this stage (A had 'V-*it*' for transitive verbs)
- Some examples from A:

More crackers	('I want more crackers') said as [tatɹz]
That bicycle	('That's a bicycle')
Papa eat-it	('Papa should eat it')
Duck head	('I have a duck on my head') don't ask!
Mama up	('Mama should pick me up')

3. Development of utterances

The **two-word stage**

- Do children have **syntactic categories** in the two-word stage?
  - How could we test this? Can we tell?

- **Word order** mostly matches adult language
  - But children may learn word order verb by verb at first (before using a general X'-schema)

3. Development of utterances

The **telegraphic stage** (approx. age 2)

- What morpheme **type** is missing?
  - From *CL*, p 370 — *Chair broken.*
    Man ride bus today.
    Car make noise.
  - From A — *Eat-it orange fork mouth.*
    Mama draw big blue O.

3. Development of utterances

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- Once the telegraphic stage begins, further development is very rapid (see *CL*, Table 9.19, pp 371-2)

3. Development of utterances

- One fact about individual children that is often reported in research on child language is the child's MLU, or *mean length of utterance*
  - This can be measured in **words** or **morphemes**

3. Development of utterances

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  - Children's development follows a typical sequence, but the age at which each child reached a certain stage can vary by months

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- Why might MLU be more useful than chronological age in comparing children?
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- Can MLU help indicate when a child has left the telegraphic stage and become more adult-like? (What should happen to MLU at this point?)
  - MLU measured in morphemes should increase when inflectional affixes start to appear!

4. Later development: Movement

- The **Inversion** rule: How does this develop for English-acquiring children?
  a. Questions signaled by intonation only
  b. A relatively rare pattern: *Can he can look?*
     → What rule does this child's grammar have?
  c. Adult-like application of Inversion

- Some children pass through a stage where they can apply Inversion…except when they have to apply *Wh* Movement too

4. Later development: Movement

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  What do you think is in the box?

  - Hint: How many TPs/CPs do we have here?

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  Deep structure ('zero'/'silent' C in embedded clause):

  C NP T V C NP T V [----PP-----]

  +Q you -Pst think [$_{CP}$ Ø [$_{TP}$ what -Pst is in the box]

4. Later development: Movement

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- Suppose we want to study this type of *wh* question in child language. How might we collect data?

  - Naturalistic vs. experiment studies (what are the pros and cons?)

  - Here is a video of a *wh*-question study

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  - What does this child's current *Wh* Movement rule seem to be?
  - The child seems to move the *wh* phrase to the specifier of CP, but leaves a copy of it behind instead of leaving a trace (*t*) in the structure!

    This particular child pattern is not necessarily common, but is sometimes observed