Homework #4:  
Language Acquisition

Due: Monday, September 10, 1PM

1. **Phonology of Child Language**: In the holophrastic (one-word stage of child language acquisition, the child's phonological system differs in systematic ways from that in the adult grammar. The inventory of sounds and the phonemic contrasts are smaller, and there are greater constraints on phonotactics (i.e. what are phonologically possible words; recall our discussion of [bnik]; textbook pp. 300-302).

   A. For each of the following words produced by a child, state what the substitution is, and any other differences that result.

   Example:
   
   spook  \([ph\text{uk}]\) Substitution: initial cluster [sp] reduced to a single consonant; /p/ becomes aspirated, showing that the child has acquired the aspiration rule.
   
   (1) don't  \([dot]\)
   (2) skip  \([k^h\text{ip}]\)
   (3) shoe  \([su]\)
   (4) that  \([dæ\text{t}]\)
   (5) play  \([p^h\text{e}]\)
   (6) thump  \([d\text{wp}]\)
   (7) bath  \([bæ\text{t}]\)
   (8) chop  \([t^h\text{ap}]\)
   (9) kitty  \([k\text{iri}]^1\)
   (10) light  \([\text{wait}]\)
   (11) dolly  \([\text{da}\text{oi}]\)
   (12) grow  \([\text{go}]\)

   B. State some general rules that account for the kinds of deviations from the adult pronunciations that are given above.

2. **Testing Morphological Knowledge**: Make up a “wug test” to test a child's knowledge of each of the morphemes below. Write short scripts (like the ones from the original wug test) that will check to see if the child knows the correct morpheme. Taking the original wug test as your model, your test ought to require the child to use the relevant morpheme and should work on made-up words.

   comparative  -er  (as in bigger)
   superlative  -est  (as in biggest)
   past tense  -ed  (as in I danced)
   agentive  -er  (as in writer)

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1^Remember, most American English speakers don't pronounce either 'writer' or 'rider' with a [t] or [d], rather they use a different phone: [ɾ]. See p. 244.
3. **Syntax of Child Language:** Children frequently produce sentences such as the ones below. (Appropriate contexts are given in brackets)

- Don't giggle me!
  
  [Context: *The child is being threatened with tickling*]

- I danced the clown.
  
  [Context: *The child is playing with a clown doll so that the doll appears to be dancing*]

- You can push her mouth open to drink her.
  
  [Context: *The child's doll came with a bottle and has a mouth that can open and close*]

- Who deaded my kitty cat?
  
  [Context: *The child found their cat doll lying down, looking as if it had been violently knocked over*]

- Are you gonna pretty yourself?
  
  [Context: *The child sees their mother getting ready to put on make up*]

  **a.** ‘Translate’ these sentences into syntactically well-formed sentences in adult English.

  **b.** How would you characterize the difference between the grammar or lexicon of children who produce such sentences and the grammar or lexicon of adult speakers of English? Is there any consistent way in which the child’s sentences are different from the adult ‘translations’?

4. **Lexical Acquisition:** Children learn demonstrative words such as *this, that, these, those,* temporal terms such as *now, then, tomorrow,* and spatial terms such as *here, there, right,* and *behind* relatively late.

  **a.** What do all these words have in common? Why might that factor delay their acquisition? (A complete answer could be given in two short sentences.)

  **b.** Considering your answer to a., name one other aspect of language that you might expect to develop rather late, and briefly explain your answer. (A complete answer could be given in a single sentence.)

5. **Written Response:** After viewing the *Playing the Language Game,* provide a 300-400 word response detailing your thoughts on UG as a hypothesis. Examples: what do you find convincing? Not convincing? Intriguing? Surprising? Funny? Are you curious about anything after watching the video? Or any other topic on UG you wish to discuss.

Your response must make reference to specific language data – **include three concrete examples** of language usage (either from the video or otherwise) that illustrate your thoughts.

If you were absent for the video, it is available for download on the CCLE site.