Language Acquisition Issues 4  
SCSD 712 001  
Number of Credits: 2 Credits  
Course Time: Lectures: Tuesdays 2 to 4 pm  
September 18 and 25  
October 9 and 23  
November 6, 20, and 27

Instructor:  
Elin Thordardottir, Ph.D.  
Office: Beatty Hall, 62A  
Office Phone: 398-5356  
Office Hours: By appointment (right after class on Tuesdays or set up by phone or by email)  
Email: elin.thordardottir@mcgill.ca

COURSE CONTENT:
The goal of the course is to explore issues related to the concept of specific (or primary) developmental language impairment (SLI/PLI). We will take a critical look at various issues surrounding the underlying nature of SLI, how it is identified in various populations, and how it affects the lives of those who have it. We will take a look at this disorder from the viewpoint of the various disciplines: Speech-Language Pathology, Psychology, Linguistics and Education and explore the extent to which these disciplines ask different questions and contribute to our understanding of different aspects of the disorder.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
By the end of this course students will:  
- have a deeper understanding of the concept of SLI and of its theoretical and clinical significance  
- have a deeper understanding of the dilemmas in how to identify children with SLI and of how this impacts both clinical work and research  
- have a deeper understanding of the relationship between the scores of children with SLI and various tasks and 1) the underlying nature of the disorder, and 2) the impact of the disorder on daily life in social and academic settings
INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD:

The course has a mixed format, including some lectures by the instructor. However, most of the class time will be devoted to presentations by students. Each student will select a topic from the list below and prepare a presentation on this topic. Students should use readings from those suggested and add other readings as well from the literature. It is important that the class as a whole participate actively in discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

Grading is PASS/FAIL. In order to PASS, students need to research a topic and present to the class, as well as participate actively in discussions related to class-mates’ presentations. It is important that students attend all classes to contribute to discussion. If you cannot make it to class, please notify the instructor.

McGILL POLICY STATEMENTS:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS

1. The diagnosis of SLI. What is this disorder? How is it defined and how is it identified across languages? What areas of language need to be impaired for a diagnosis to be made? At what level and in comparison to what? Impact on research studies? Clinical impact?

   Suggested readings:

   Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM, American Psychiatric Association)
   ICD-10 (WHO)
   SLCN (Speech-Language and Communication Needs, UK)
   ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, WHO)


2. How specific to language is the impairment in SLI? Is this a legitimate diagnostic category? What is the usefulness of this clinical label and for what purposes?

3. **Does SLI manifest in particular domains of language more so than others?** It is often stated that SLI involves a particular difficulty in morphosyntax. Take a cross-linguistic look. What cross-linguistic evidence is there that SLI manifests particularly in the morphosyntactic domain?


4. **What is the relationship of “clinical markers” to the underlying nature of SLI?** What does it take for a particular behaviour to be a clinical marker? Are clinical markers a window into the underlying nature of SLI?


5. **What are the educational implications of having SLI?** How do children with SLI do
in school and how do their academic successes/failures relate to their diagnostic results (their clinical profile, clinical markers that identified them)? What aspects of this deficit are responsible for the impact of the disorder on academic success?

Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G. & Palikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: previous academic history and literacy skills. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 27, 223-237.


6. The manifestation and identification of SLI in bilingual children. Why is it hard to identify SLI correctly in bilingual children? What are some solutions that have been proposed?

Position statements of ASHA, CASLPA and IALP


7. The notion of whether bilingual acquisition is “more difficult” than monolingual acquisition. Is it? What do people mean by statements relating to “difficulty”? What is it like for a bilingual child to have SLI? Should children with SLI attend bilingual schooling such as immersion programs? Will it be “difficult” for them?

Elin Thordardottir & Anna Gudrun Juliusdottir (2012). Icelandic as a second language: A longitudinal study of language knowledge and processing by school-


8. **Is there an interaction between bilingualism and language impairment? Is their effect cumulative? Is there a “protective” effect of a “bilingual advantage”***


9. **What does SLI look like in adults who were diagnosed with it as children?***

