Psycholinguistics (LING/PSYC 27010)

Autumn, 2016 // University of Chicago

HOMEWORK #2   (due thurs, oct13)

The goal of the second assignment is to get you thinking and writing critically about theory and methods in language acquisition research. There are two options for the homework.

Option 1

Think of how the nativism versus statistical-learning-only debate can be approached experimentally. In particular, describe an experiment that is designed to produce results relevant to the debate. You can either make up a hypothetical experiment of your own, or find an article that uses an experiment format we did *not* discuss at length in class (if you find an article with multiple experiments, just choose one of them). Make sure to address, in no more than a couple of pages, the following points:

- what are the stimuli of the experiment?
  (e.g. picture-word pairs on a computer screen, videos, etc.)
- what is the task?
  (i.e. what is the research subject supposed to do)
- what is being varied/manipulated?
  (e.g. S&G2004 varied what kind of information was available to the subject)

If you chose a hypothetical experiment, also address these questions:

- what kind of result would you expect, and why?
- how would you interpret this result, and how does it relate to the nativism debate?

If you chose an existing experiment from a research article, also address these questions:

- what kind of result did the authors find?
- how did they interpret this result, and do you find their interpretation convincing?

Suggestion: This would be a good opportunity to work in groups! (see syllabus for guidelines)
Alternative: You can choose a different theoretical debate if you approve it with me first.

Option 2

Characterize the debate between nativist and statistical learning-based theories of first language acquisition. In particular, address the following topics in no more than a couple of pages:

- What are the core tenets of each theory?
- Describe a major objection to each theory.
- Which theory do you find most convincing? Why?
- Do you think the papers we read provide evidence for one (or both) of the theories? Why?