

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Developing incrementality: Grammar and parsing
of wh-dependencies in children

Friday, October 7, 2016

2:40 PM

Location: HUM 2 - Room 259

Abstract:

It is well established in the adult psycholinguistics literature that our comprehension is incremental: based on partial sentence input, the parser uses linguistic knowledge and multiple sources of information to assign interpretations. However, it has largely remained unknown how such incremental processing mechanisms emerge during development, or how the immature parsing mechanisms affect the course of grammar acquisition. In this talk, I will present recent studies in my lab that explore these questions for wh-dependencies. In the first part of the talk, I will discuss how the mis-adoption of wh-scope marking grammar in English-speaking children (Thornton, 1990) could derive from incremental processing of wh-dependencies. I argue that while this is theoretically feasible, the apparent scope-marking grammar may be a production-specific phenomenon, and that it does not result from a mis-set parameter, at least in English. In the second part of the talk, I will explore how incremental mechanisms for wh-dependency processing develop through language experience. Our visual world eye-tracking studies show that 5-year-old children do not complete wh-dependencies incrementally, but incremental dependency processing emerges after production (but not comprehension) priming of such dependencies. I will discuss implications of these findings for theories of language acquisition and language processing.