Writing Assignment #1:
Critical Summary of an Article

4 pages, 1.5 or double-spaced. Indent each paragraph; no extra spaces between paragraphs.

Description

For the first paper in this class, you will read a published article that makes a claim about language, and write a short critical paper that summarizes and evaluates the authors' claim. In order to do this, you will need to consider the evidence that is put forward in support of the claim and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the authors' arguments. Are you convinced by the authors' evidence and arguments? If not, why? If you see weaknesses, suggest alternative interpretations or explanations of the evidence. You can also consider suggesting alternative experiments or other types of evidence that could strengthen the authors' claim. You are not expected to do any research or consult other sources of information for this assignment.

A well-written paper should:
- Concisely summarize the main thesis/claim of the paper
- Describe the key evidence that is presented in support of the claim
- Evaluate whether the evidence confirms the researchers' claim, or whether there might be other possible interpretations of their findings

In addition, the paper should do *one or more* of the following:
- If the evidence is ambiguous or insufficient to confirm the claim, discuss what type of data would be helpful in order to distinguish between the competing hypotheses or interpretations

- If the evidence actually seems to support a different interpretation than the one that is advanced in the article, provide an argument for why we should draw a different conclusion from what the researcher(s) advocate

- Discuss possible implications of the finding, if you believe it is true. For example: What further predictions might we make, based on this result? What are some new hypotheses that we might make, and what sorts of additional data might we want to collect to test them?

Be sure to cite page numbers of any quotations from the article. Also, give your essay an engaging and descriptive title—*not* simply "Writing Assignment #1". Papers will be evaluated for content, coherence, clarity of expression, and mechanical correctness.

Articles to choose from
Note: While these articles do have some technical content, they are not intended solely for readers with a strong background in linguistics. Although there will be some technical terms and details of the analysis that go beyond what you have studied so far, you should be able to grasp *central ideas and claims* of the article—and that is all that we are expecting. If you are uncertain as to whether you are interpreting a technical term or analysis correctly, simply indicate so, and proceed on the assumption that you are correct. (It is also fine to ask the instructor or a TA to verify your interpretation.)

Below is the list of articles to choose from. Begin by glancing through the titles, and then go to the papers whose titles pique your curiosity and read their abstracts. That should enable you to pick an article that you'll find especially interesting to read, analyze, and write about.
- Iris Berent, Tracy Lennertz, Jongho Jun, Miguel A. Moreno, and Paul Smolensky. "Language universals in human brains." *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science.* 8 April 2008. Vol. 105, no. 14. pp 5321-5325.

- Brian Butterworth, Robert Reeve, Fiona Reynolds, and Delyth Lloyd. "Numerical thought with and without words: Evidence from indigenous Australian children." *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science.* 2 September 2008. Vol. 105, no. 35. pp 13179-13184.

- Marie Coppola & Elissa L. Newport. "Grammatical subjects in home sign: Abstract linguistic structure in adult primary gesture systems without linguistic input." *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science.* 27 December, 2005. Vol. 102, no. 52. pp 19249-19253.

- Jenny R. Saffran, Richard N. Aslin, and Elissa L. Newport. "Statistical learning by 8-month-old infants." *Science,* New Series, 13 December 1996. Vol. 274, no. 5294, pp 1926-1928.

- Wendy Sandler, Irit Meir, Carol Padden, and Mark Aronoff. "The Emergence of grammar: Systematic structure in a new language." *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science,* 15 February 2005. Vol. 102, no. 7, pp 2661-2665.

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