Contents

List of figures and tables xi
Acknowledgements xiii
Preface xv

1 Introduction to language acquisition 1
1.1 The issue 1
1.2 What is language? 2
1.3 Humans and other animals 8
1.4 Getting the conditions right 13
1.5 Chapter summary 17
1.6 Suggested reading 18
1.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 18
1.8 Useful websites 19
1.9 Comprehension check 19

2 The sounds of language 20
2.1 The issue 20
2.2 Speech perception: identifying the meaningful sounds of our language 21
2.3 How do we learn to segment the speech stream? 32
2.4 Speech production: learning to produce the meaningful sounds of our language 39
2.5 Chapter summary 45
2.6 Suggested reading 46
2.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 46
2.8 Comprehension check 47

3 Learning the meaning of words 49
3.1 The issue 49
3.2 Constraints theory part I: the role of innate constraints 55
3.3 Constraints theory part II: the developmental lexical principles framework 58
3.4 Other routes to word learning 60
3.5 The role of syntax: the syntactic bootstrapping account 68
3.6 The integration: the emergentist coalition model (ECM) 73
3.7 Chapter summary 77
3.8 Suggested reading 78
3.9 Suggested reading (advanced level) 78
3.10 Comprehension check 79

4 Acquiring syntax 80
4.1 The issue 80
4.2 Nativist theories of syntax acquisition 86
4.3 Constructivist theories of syntactic development 96
4.4 How do children learn to constrain their productivity? 104
4.5 Chapter summary 111
4.6 Suggested reading 112
4.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 112
4.8 Comprehension check 114

5 Acquiring morphology 115
5.1 The issue 115
5.2 What is inflectional morphology? 116
5.3 How do children learn their language's inflectional system? 120
5.4 Nativist accounts I: maturational theories 122
5.5 Nativist accounts II: probabilistic parameter setting 125
5.6 Constructivist theories 128
5.7 How do we store and produce inflections? 131
5.8 Chapter summary 141
5.9 Suggested reading 142
5.10 Suggested reading (advanced level) 143
5.11 Comprehension check 144

6 Learning to communicate 145
6.1 The issue 145
6.2 Communication without words 146
6.3 Communicating with language 154
6.4 Communicative impairments 164
6.5 Chapter summary 171
6.6 Suggested reading 173
6.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 173
6.8 Comprehension check 174

7 Multilingual language acquisition 175
7.1 The issue 175
7.2 One system or two? 176
7.3 Predictors of successful bilingualism 189
7.4 Effect of bilingualism on cognitive development 197
7.5 Chapter summary 200
7.6 Suggested reading 201
7.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 201
7.8 Comprehension check 202

8 Explaining individual variation 203
8.1 The issue 203

8.2 Individual variation 204
8.3 Extraordinary language acquisition 214
8.4 The relationship between language and cognitive impairment 220
8.5 Chapter summary 229
8.6 Suggested reading 230
8.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 231
8.8 Useful websites 231
8.9 Comprehension check 231

9 The search for language universals 233
9.1 The issue 233
9.2 Language variation and language universals 233
9.3 Chomsky's Universal Grammar 234
9.4 The nature of the language learning mechanism 245
9.5 Chapter summary 256
9.6 Suggested reading 257
9.7 Suggested reading (advanced level) 257
9.8 Useful websites 258
9.9 Comprehension check 258

References 260
Index 296