**RESEARCH PROPOSAL ANSWER SHEET (Example)**

Group members [ Maryam Seifeldin, Chigusa Kurumada ]

1. **Research question**

1-1. Research question (Word limit: 50 words)  
  
How do young children learn the multitude of meanings of the English auxiliary CAN? Do they learn the meaning of “ability/capability” (e.g., *I can ride a bike*) and “permission” (e.g., *Can I ride my bike?*) simultaneously?

1-2. Briefly state what makes this question interesting (Word limit: 100 words)

In the class we learned that functional utility of utterances is one of the guiding factor of children’s language acquisition. This assumption predicts that the meaning of “permission” should be learned earlier. On the other hand, we also learned that a request function of questions such as “Can you pass me the salt?” is derived via a pragmatic inference based on the capability interpretation of CAN. This assumption makes an opposite prediction namely that children first need to learn the meaning of capability and then derive the permission interpretation.

1. Data availability

2-1. Target speakers

1. Datasets to be used (circle all that apply)

Alex (Providence)

1. Speakers to be included in your data (child only? Child and adult speakers?)

Alex (Child)

1. Age range of the target child(ren)

2;2 (ale20.cha) – 3;5 (ale52.cha): There was no production of CAN between ale01.cha - ale19.cha

2-2. Commands to extract target sentences   
 a. List at least 1 command that you are going to use

To count frequencies of “can”

freq @ +t\*CHI +scan +r5 +u \*.cha > CanFreq.cex

To extract instances of uses

kwal @ +t\*CHI +scan +w3 -w3 +r5 +u \*.cha > CanUses.cex

b. Number of target sentences you found (in each dataset). List all if you looked at multiple datasets

342

1. List at least three papers and explain the relevance of them to the current project. (No more than 5 sentences for each paper)

(1) Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct*. New York: Morrow.

Pinker lists sample utterances produced by a child between the ages of 28 months and 38 months. In this case-study, the first use of CAN was observed at the age of 34 months and it is used to express the meaning of capability (“I cannot wear it tomorrow”). By 38 months, however, the child seems to have acquired both meanings (“Can I put my head in the mailbox so the mailman can know where I are and put me in the mailbox?”)

(2) Kuczaj, S. A., & Maratsos, M. P. (1975). What children can say before they will. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development*, 21 (2), 89-111.

Kuczaj and Maratsos found in their case-study that children first make declarative

uses of CAN and then start using them in Yes-No / Wh-questions. They also found that the negative form of CAN (i.e., can't or cannot) tends to occur earlier in children’s production rather than the affirmative form.

(3) Diessel, H. (2011). Grammaticalization and language acquisition. In Bernd Heine and Heiko Norrog (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization*, pp. 130-141. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CAN also has the meaning of possibility (e.g., It can rain tomorrow). This meaning develops later than the other meanings possibly due to its conceptual complexity.

4. Hypothesis

A child first starts using the auxiliary CAN in the negative (declarative) form. At this stage, CAN mainly expresses a lack of ability to perform a particular action. This is later extended to communicative functions such as giving or denying permission (e.g., You can/cannot do it). As the child learns to form Yes-No questions, it further acquires the function of requesting an action (e.g., “Can you draw a horse?”) and permission (e.g., “Can I eat the lollipop”)? The meaning of possibility (e.g., It can rain tomorrow) may not appear until much later.

5. To-Do list (for your 5 minute class presentation)

1. Collect 60 examples of CAN at three different time points (2;2-2;6, 2;6-3;0, 3;0-3;5, 20 examples each). [Amanda]
2. Annotate the examples as “capability” or “permission” [Amanda, Chigusa]
3. Count the numbers of each case and visualize the data [Chigusa]
4. Discuss and summarize results [Amanda, Chigusa]
5. Make slides [Amanda, Chigusa]

6. References

Bates, E. (1976). *Language and context: the acquisition of pragmatics*. NY: Academic Press.

Diessel, H. (2011). Grammaticalization and language acquisition. In Bernd Heine and Heiko Norrog (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization*, pp. 130-141. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct*. New York: Morrow.

Stephany, U. (1986). Modality. In P. Fletcher and M. Garman (eds.), *Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 375-400.