1 Description and goals

In this course, we will examine the fascinating topic of how children acquire language. Students will learn about the acquisition and development of phonology, syntax, morphology, and semantics in child language, and theories that have been developed to account for them. We will also discuss the brain and language development, experimental methods for evaluating the linguistic knowledge of children, bilingualism, and heritage languages. The overall goal is to arrive at a coherent picture of the language learning process.

2 Prerequisites

Ling 100a (Introduction to Linguistics) is recommended. Students in other fields (including psychology) with a strong interest in language acquisition and development are welcome to take the course but may need to do additional background readings from time to time during the semester.

3 Readings

Our textbook will be: Lust, Barbara. Child Language: Acquisition and Growth. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics.

Additional recommended and required readings will be made available on the course LATTE site from time to time.

4 LATTE

Please check the course LATTE site frequently. The course schedule, additional/supplemental readings, assignments, and other materials will be posted on the site as we progress through the semester.
5 Requirements and grading

Assignments
- Reading responses: 20%
- Homework assignments: 10%
- Two projects (including presentations): 30% (15% each)
- Participation and attendance: 10%
- Quizzes: 30%
Total: 100%

5.1 Assignments

The assignments for the course comprise two types: weekly reading responses, and occasional written assignments.

*Reading responses* will be due by class every Monday, and will require you to make a post on the forum on the course website with the following two items: (i) something that you found interesting in the readings for the previous week, and (ii) a question that the readings raised for you, which may be a point of confusion or something that is unclear, something you wonder about, or something that may be interesting to investigate. In addition, you must comment on (respond to) at least one other person's post for the week. Reading responses will receive credit only if submitted on time; no extensions will be granted.

In addition, there will be approximately 4 *written homework assignments* during the semester. Assignments must be typed, are due at the beginning of class, and will be graded on a 10-point scale. Late homework will be accepted only until the graded assignment has been returned, *provided that* one point will be deducted for each day the assignment is late. Please note that homework submitted on the date it is due but after the beginning of class will be deemed one day late.

5.2 Projects

Two projects will be assigned during the semester and require both an oral presentation and brief write-up of 5-10 pages. The first project will involve the analysis of data from the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) corpus; presentations are tentatively scheduled for the week of March 16, with the write-up due on Monday, March 23. For the second project, each student will select a topic of his/her choice (subject to approval); presentations are scheduled for the week of April 20, with the write-up due on Friday, May 1. No extensions will be granted on either project.

5.3 Participation and attendance

Class attendance is required and participation in class is expected. While you will not be penalized for being quiet in class, I hope very much that you will ask questions and want to participate in class discussions.

You may miss up to two classes for any reason, without penalty. Each additional class missed will result in a reduction of your final percentage grade for the course by 0.5%, up to a maximum of 10% lost.
5.4 Quizzes

There will be two quizzes during the semester which will together comprise 30% of your final grade. I will provide more details on each as the dates approach.

6 Electronic devices

No electronic devices (including laptops, tablets, and cellphones) may be used in class without my prior permission. Please keep all cellphones put away (and turn them off completely if the thought of a new message is irresistible).

7 Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

8 Academic integrity

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/svpse/academicintegrity/). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

9 Topics and general schedule

The topics that will be covered in the course and general schedule, along with the chapters that we will read from the textbook in each section, are as follows (subject to minor change based on class progress and interests):

Weeks 1-2: What is the problem of language acquisition?

- Lust ch. 1: The growth of language
- Lust ch. 2: What is acquired?
- Lust ch. 3: What is the problem of language acquisition?

Week 3-5: Constructing a theory of language acquisition

- Lust ch. 4: How can we construct a theory of language acquisition?
- Lust ch. 5: Brain and language development
- Lust ch. 6: The nature of nurture
- Lust ch. 7: How can we tell what children know? Methods for the study of language acquisition

Midterm recess: Feb. 16-20
Weeks 7-11: Acquisition of the grammar

- Lust ch. 8: The acquisition of phonology
- **Quiz #1** (tentatively sched. for Wed., Feb. 25)
- The acquisition of morphology
- Presentations of Project #1 (tentatively sched. for week of Mar. 16, with papers due Mon., Mar. 23)
- Lust ch. 9: The acquisition of syntax
- Lust ch. 10: The acquisition of semantics

Weeks 11-14: Bilingualism and heritage languages

- **Quiz #2** (tentatively sched. for Wed., Apr. 1)
- Spring recess: April 3-10

Week 15: Presentations of Project #2 (week of Apr. 20, with papers due Fri., May 1)

Week 16: Conclusions

- Lust ch. 12: Conclusions: toward an integrated theory of language acquisition