Ling 197A: Language Acquisition and Development  
Spring 2017

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Office hours: M 1-2pm, W 11-12pm or by appt.  
(Advising OH: M 2-3pm, priority for advising)

Teaching Assistant: TBD  
TA office hours: TBD

Course time and location: MW 3:30-4:50pm, Volen 119

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.

This course also satisfies the Oral Communications requirement.

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.

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 for 2 days after an assignment's due date, *provided that* one point will be deducted for each day the assignment is late, up to a maximum of 2 points off. Please note that homework submitted on the date it is due but after the beginning of class will be deemed one day late. As an illustration, if an assignment due on a Wednesday is submitted on by midnight on Thursday, the assignment would be accepted but 1 point would be deducted from the grade for the assignment.

Please note that it is expected that you will expend three hours of out of class effort (e.g., reading, writing papers, completing assignments, studying for exams) each week for each hour of classroom instruction.

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. For the second project, each student will select a topic of his/her choice (subject to approval). No extensions will be granted on either project.

5.3 Participation and attendance

Class attendance is required and preparedness for and participation in class is expected. Please come to class each day on time and prepared to engage with the assigned material.

You may miss up to two classes for any reason. 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 5% lost. Please note that you will be deemed absent on any day in which you use an electronic device in class without prior permission.
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). (See also Participation and attendance, above.)

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 honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Research Guides - Citing Sources.

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
  
  Quiz #1 - Wed., Feb. 15

February recess: Feb. 20-24

Weeks 7-11: Acquisition of the grammar
• Lust ch. 8: The acquisition of phonology
• The acquisition of morphology
• Presentations of Project #1 (tentatively sched. for week of Mar. 13, with papers due Mon., Mar. 20)
• Lust ch. 9: The acquisition of syntax
• Lust ch. 10: The acquisition of semantics

Weeks 11-14: Bilingualism and heritage languages

• Quiz #2 - Wed., Mar. 29
• Passover and spring recess Apr. 10-18

Week 15: Presentations of Project #2

Week 16: Conclusions

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