LING 3458: Topics in Linguistics: Language Acquisition (CRN 36502)
Northeastern University, Spring 2015

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION
Instructor      H. Littlefield, Ph.D.
E-Mail          h.littlefield@neu.edu (preferred contact)
Office          548 Nightingale Hall; 617.373.3164
Office hours   Tuesdays, 12:50pm – 2:50pm; Fridays, 11:35am – 1:35pm
                If these times are not convenient, please contact me to set up an appointment.

COURSE INFORMATION
Class meetings
Tuesdays and Fridays, 8:00 to 9:40am; 267 Ryder Hall

Course description
This course seeks to introduce students to the field of language acquisition. The central aim of this field is to understand how all normally-developing children acquire their first language so effortlessly, and in such a short period of time. The first part of the course will set the stage by surveying the most widely used research methods and theoretical models used in the field. Second, the acquisition of language structures will be detailed: phonetics and phonology, semantics and the lexicon, morphology, and syntax. Finally, we build on previous topics, and turn to various topics in acquisition, including children’s acquisition of pragmatics, the role of social factors such as gender and ethnic background in acquisition, school-aged acquisition, literacy, and bilingualism. While the acquisition material will concentrate on the normal first language acquisition of English, some coverage of atypical language development will be provided.

Prerequisites
Students must have taken at least one course covering introductory linguistics (LING 1150 or the equivalent), as a working knowledge of linguistic terminology and concepts is assumed. No previous knowledge of language acquisition is assumed.

COURSE RESOURCES
Blackboard website
The Blackboard site for the course is an excellent reference for course materials including the syllabus, assignment guidelines, lecture slides, and supplemental readings not found in the textbooks.

Required textbook

Digital audio recording device
You will need a digital audio recorder (or equivalent) to record at least one hour of child discourse, which you will use throughout the term as the basis for your language analysis project. Digital audio recorders are available at the bookstore or an electronics store. I also have several that will allow you to record your data and save it to your computer. Contact me if you’d like to borrow one.

Software
You will need access to Microsoft Excel for the language analysis project.
Reading of assigned literature
Because in-class lectures are designed to complement and augment the information in the readings, it is your responsibility to prepare the readings before class meetings so that you have a basic familiarity of the terms and concepts of each topic.

Regular attendance and active participation
Participation in class discussions and activities is essential to your progress in this course. To underscore the importance of this aspect of the class, you will receive a grade for your attendance and participation at midterm and at the end of the term. This grade will be based on the quantity and quality of your efforts in class discussions and activities. Reading, texting, surfing the web, etc. will negatively affect your participation, as will not preparing the required assignments before class. Lastly, it goes without saying that absences and tardiness will negatively affect your attendance and participation grade, and you are responsible for getting notes, solutions to in-class problems, etc. from a classmate for information missed. Please note that while it is not recommended that you miss any class meetings, you may be absent for two class meetings during the semester without penalty to your participation grade (one before midterm, one after midterm). This includes absences for any reason, including illness and emergencies. There are no “excused” absences, so be sure to plan and use your absences wisely.

Language analysis project and report
This project is designed to provide you with experience in the transcription and analysis of a young child’s language development, so that you can apply the structures information that we discuss in class to a data set. The project will be completed in steps throughout the course, and a report synthesizing the results will be turned in at the end of the semester. Guidelines for the project and final report will be provided separately, and each step of the project will be discussed in class.

Article Presentation: Topics in Language Acquisition
This in-class presentation provides an opportunity for students to explore an area of language acquisition in greater depth. You will find a recent article within the field that interests you, and then prepare and present the contents of that article to the class. You must check with me at least one week in advance of your presentation to make sure that your article will fulfill the assignment. Further guidelines for selecting and presenting the article will be provided in class.

Cumulative final exam
The final exam will cover all of the material covered in class and in the readings, but it will be weighted to cover the material of the last half of the term in more detail. The exam will not be open-book or open-note. To do well, you must have completed all of the readings, assignments, and attended class regularly. Review materials will be provided during the last week of class.

Extra credit
Opportunities for extra credit may be available occasionally throughout the course. These opportunities must be taken when they are offered, and turned in on time.

COURSE GRADES
Calculation of grades
In calculating grades, I use a criterion-referenced grading system. That means that your final grade for the course is calculated by taking the total number of points that you have earned in the class (including extra credit points) and dividing by the total number of possible points (excluding extra credit points). This percentage is used to assign your letter grade according to the scale below (see “Grading scale”).
The anticipated values for the course requirements are provided below. In the unlikely event of the need to shift the total points (i.e. drop an assignment due to lack of time at the end of the term), you will be notified in class. Importantly, all efforts will be made to keep the average weight of each requirement the same, so the relative value of each type of work is not altered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language acquisition analysis project: Transcript</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonetics &amp; Phonology</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics and the Lexicon</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphosyntax: MLU, Brown’s 14 morphemes; syntax topic</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final report</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article Presentation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumulative final exam</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>750</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: These figures do not appear to add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 1: Anticipated values for course requirements

**Grading scale**

Because I am using a criterion-referenced system, I use an absolute scale (as shown below), and there is no curve. Note that “A” work is exceptional: it goes beyond just completing an assignment accurately and obviously exceeds the minimum requirements. It shows a clear attention to detail and demonstrates the highest levels of depth and breadth of conceptual comprehension. [Please note that while I have an “A+” grade listed here, Northeastern does not allow for the assignment of “A+” grades. I will, however, report this as the top grade possible in my courses in letters of recommendation.]

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97 – 100%</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 96.9%</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 92.9%</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 – 89.9%</td>
<td>Failure</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 – 82.9%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 – 79.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73 – 76.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70 – 72.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67 – 69.9%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63 – 66.9%</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60 – 62.9%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0 – 59.9%</td>
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Table 2: Grading scale

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Academic integrity**

All work that you turn in must be your own: cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (the invention of data) of any kind will not be accepted. Any violation of academic integrity will be immediately reported to the Office of Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) and will be given an automatic zero. If you are unsure as to what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, etc., please see me before you turn in any work. I strongly recommend that you read the information at the following sites: www.northeastern.edu/osccr/ and www.lib.neu.edu/online_research/help/avoiding_plagiarism/.
Students with disabilities
If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise) and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me as soon as possible so we can work out a plan to meet your needs.

Electronic devices
Using personal electronic devices in the classroom can hinder instruction and learning, not only for you, but also for your classmates, and for me, your instructor. Please be courteous to all, and make sure to turn your cell phone off and keep it put away during class. Laptops, tablets and other electronic equipment are not allowed in class except for the express purpose of taking notes.

Expectations for participation
You should come to class prepared to contribute your perspectives and opinions, be open to engaging in hands-on learning, and be prepared to listen respectfully to others. This includes being sensitive to the opinions and observations of others, and everyone’s right to participate: participants should not dominate class time or engage in disruptive behaviors (chatting with a neighbor, texting, surfing the web, etc.).

Submission of coursework
All work must be submitted electronically, unless otherwise noted.

General formatting guidelines
All work must be typed with a standard 12-point serif font, be single-spaced, and have 1-inch margins; a stylesheet will be provided for more specific formatting guidelines.

Late work
All work must be turned in on time or ahead of time. “On time” for work due in class means at the beginning of class on the day that it is due; other deadlines will be specific as to date and time. If you will be absent, you must submit the assignment before the deadline. Late work will be deducted by 20%; assignments more than one week late will not be accepted, and will receive a score of ‘0’.

WHERE TO FIND HELP

Instructor
I am always happy to help answer questions, and provide extra assistance. Drop by anytime during my office hours, or make an appointment, if those aren’t convenient. I’m also happy to answer questions via e-mail (be sure to allow for a day or so, as I may not be able to respond immediately).

Study groups
Many students find that discussing their work with their fellow classmates helps them to understand the material more fully. Small study groups of two to four people are ideal, as they allow for everyone to contribute their ideas and questions to the discussion.

Blackboard
The slides from class are posted once a topic is completed; these will be helpful for reviewing the material and filling in your notes.

COURSE SCHEDULE
This schedule is tentative and may be revised over the course of the semester. If revised, you will receive an updated copy in class, and it will be posted on Blackboard. Due dates for assignments will be specified in class; the weeks when work is expected to be due are indicated here for general planning purposes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 13, 16</td>
<td>Introduction to the course; Methods of inquiry</td>
<td>In Berko Gleason &amp; Ratner, Chapter 1: Berko Gleason, The Development of Language: An overview and a preview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 20, 23</td>
<td>Data collection; Setting the stage for language: Nonlinguistic and prelinguistic development</td>
<td>In Berko Gleason &amp; Ratner, Chapter 2: Newman &amp; Sachs, Communication Development in Infancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 27, 30</td>
<td>Development of phonetics and phonology</td>
<td>Berko Gleason &amp; Ratner, Chapter 3: Menn &amp; Stoel-Gammon, Phonological Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 3, 6</td>
<td>Development of semantics and the lexicon</td>
<td>Turn in: Language Analysis Project: Transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 10, 13</td>
<td>Development of morphosyntax</td>
<td>Turn in: Language Analysis Project: Phonetics and Phonology</td>
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</table>
Tomasello, M. 2000. Do young children have adult syntactic competence?  
*Cognition* 74, 209-253.

Fisher, C. 2002. The role of abstract syntactic knowledge in language acquisition:  
A reply to Tomasello. *Cognition* 82, 259-278.

**Turn in:** Language Analysis Project: Semantics and the Lexicon

**Feb 17, 20**

**Development of pragmatics**

**Readings:**
- Berko Gleason & Ratner, Chapter 6: Bryant, *Language in Social Contexts: Development of communicative competence*

**Turn in:** Language Analysis Project: MLU, Brown’s 14 morphemes, and Syntax

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**Feb 24, 27**

**Input and interaction**

**Readings:**

**Recommended:**

**Turn in:** Language Analysis Project: Pragmatics

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**Mar 3, 6**

**Biological and cognitive factors in language development**

**Readings:**

**Recommended:**

**Mar 10, 13**

**No class: Spring Break!**
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<th>Turn in</th>
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<td>Years</td>
<td>Society*. 11: 49 - 76.</td>
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<td><em>Literate Systems and Individual Lives: Perspectives on Literacy and Schooling</em>. Albany: State</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>University of New York Press, 73-91.</td>
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<td>Apr 7, 10</td>
<td>Atypical development</td>
<td>Berko Gleason &amp; Ratner, Chapter 8: Goldfield, Snow &amp; Willenberg, Variation in Language</td>
<td>Berko Gleason &amp; Ratner, Chapter 9: Ratner, Atypical Language Development</td>
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<td>Development: Implication for research and theory</td>
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<td>Apr 14, 17</td>
<td>Article Presentations: Topics in Language</td>
<td>TBA (readings will be the articles that students are presenting)</td>
<td>Jaeger, J. 2013. Excerpt: *Kids’ Slips: What Young Children’s Slips of the Tongue Reveal about</td>
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<td>Apr 21</td>
<td>Review for the Final Exam; Course Wrap-up</td>
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<td>Apr 24, 27-May 1</td>
<td>Final Exam Period</td>
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<td>Turn in: Final Exam (Date, time and place to be announced)</td>
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