



Ling 444: First Language Development

Fall 2024

Monday, Wednesday, Friday [GOR117](#)

1 Teaching staff

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Office hours: Tuesday 4:00-5:00; Wednesday 11:30-12:30

(If you can't make these times, e-mail me and we can find another time – in person or on zoom.)

Brittlea Jernigan-Hardrick (graduate teaching assistant)

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Student hours/Office hours: Thursday 11:30AM-12:30PM, Monday 12PM-1PM

2 Course Description

This course offers an overview of the field of first language acquisition. How does one develop from a pre-linguistic newborn infant to a mature language-user with a complex grammatical system (or systems, for multilinguals)? What are the relative roles of inborn cognitive abilities and input (the language data the child hears or sees in their environment) in determining the properties and time course of language development? First language development is a multifaceted, robust phenomenon in our species that proceeds over many years of early life and provides an ultra-rich testing ground for psychological, social-communicative, and linguistic theories. We will focus on linguistic development from birth through to early school age, looking at monolingual and bilingual/multilingual populations.

In the first half of the course, we will focus on development in individual linguistic domains: phonology, vocabulary, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. In the latter half of the course, we will probe deeper into theoretical approaches to language acquisition, with a focus on

primary literature and active debates in the field. We will also further explore several more specific topics at the intersection of the study of language development and the study of language as a socially embedded phenomenon, including: the development of sociolinguistic knowledge, with an emphasis on evaluation and impression formation; what LLM and ChatGPT can (or cannot) teach us about language development; and the validity, effectiveness and equitability of intervention strategies linked to language development, with an emphasis on the 30 million word gap.

3 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you'll be able to:

1. Identify and describe the stages and phenomena that characterize child language in various linguistic domains (e.g., phonology, syntax, semantics);
2. Understand the methodologies used to study language development at different ages, in different linguistic domains;
3. Understand the dominant theoretical standpoints and research approaches in the field, and the role developmental data and theory plays in larger theories of linguistics and cognition.

You'll also improve your ability to:

1. Engage with primary literature from the field and be able to summarize the main line of argumentation and the key empirical claims from a research paper
2. Discuss and analyze child language data from an informed linguistic perspective;
3. Use CHILDES (a digital database of spontaneous naturalistic child language from various populations) to collect data and compute some basic descriptive statistics used in the field.

4 Learning Resources

4.1 Textbook (strongly recommended)

The Development of Language, 10th Edition by Berko Gleason, J. & N. B. Ratner. 2024. Plural Publishers. [Link to publisher's page](#).

Availability: Ordered at the University bookstore.

Note: You can succeed in the class just by following the lectures and reading the articles; the textbook, however, could be a helpful resources to supplement these materials and preparing for the exams.

4.2 Articles

Primary sources from the literature, including scientific articles as well as introductory and overview chapters from handbooks and edited volumes. Some of these readings will be labeled as **deep dive** readings, and will receive dedicated in-depth discussion in our Friday class. These will be the starting point for your response papers. Other readings will receive less attention, but will still be addressed in class discussion. All these readings will be made freely available in Canvas.

Note: these articles are written for the scientific community at large, which includes both students and scholars/professors/researchers. This means that, in some cases, they might present challenging, difficult, or complex parts. This is by design. An important goal of this course is to develop the skill to deal with this complexity, and learn how to extract meaningful information from the scientific literature without getting into the weeds of details or distracting information. In other words: keep in mind that feeling lost or challenged is perfectly normal! Just focus on the main argument and try to get the bottom line of the article. And never hesitate to ask me or the TA questions.

4.3 Technology

Canvas: In this class, [Canvas](#), UD's online learning management system, will be used for all course activities and communication channels. All assignments will be posted through the [Canvas website](#) unless otherwise directed. Information on how to use Canvas is available through the [Canvas Student Guide](#). Canvas can also be accessed via [MyUD](#).

Poll Everywhere: We will use this online polling platform to collect real-time responses from everyone attending class. Access to Poll Everywhere is possible by using any computer or mobile device with internet access. Poll Everywhere is a UD licensed tool and there is no cost to you to use this tool. Please read over the [UD student guide](#) that will demonstrate how to log in and how to respond to polls. As a reminder, the [UD academic honesty policy](#) applies to the use of educational technology tools such as Poll Everywhere.

5 Learning assessment

The final course grade will be calculated using the following components:

- 3 Response papers: 30%
- 2 Homework assignments: 30%
- 2 Non-cumulative in-class short exams (30%)
- Engagement and participation: 10%

5.1 Response papers (30%)

You'll write three short (max. 500 words) reaction essays that discuss one aspect of the relationship between one "deep dive" article and one (or more) of the themes we discussed in the class. You

can choose any deep dive article from those discussed in the course up until the due date; but you cannot write multiple essays based off of the same deep dive article. Deadlines for the response papers are indicated in the course schedule below.

Each essay must include an explicit discussion of the link between the article and the content covered in the rest of the course. This discussion can follow a number of possible threads, including (but absolutely not limited to!) the following:

- How do the methods adopted in the article to study language development relate to other methodological approaches we discussed in class? Do they strike you as better than other approaches we considered? Or worse? Or just different? And why?
- How do the empirical findings in the paper relate to findings about similar phenomena (or the same phenomenon!) that we discussed in class? Are they in line with them? If so, what generalization is emerging? Do they contradict them? If so, is there a way of reconciling these differences?
- How do the authors of the deep dive article go about interpreting their results and framing them into a broader theory of how language development works? Can you see alternative ways in which these results can be interpreted that diverge from the authors' one? What could that be?

You are welcome to draw on each of these themes, or to focus on other areas. Either way, there are two pitfalls you must be careful to avoid:

- A response paper **cannot be a mere plot summary of the deep dive article**. It must contain an explicit discussion of how the article relates to the course content – drawing on the lectures and/or the textbook.
- The article should not discuss content or works that have not been discussed in class or the textbook.

You will receive a full grade as long as you show that you have read the article, and that you have made a reasonable, good-faith effort to relate the content of the article to the course materials.

5.2 Homework assignments (30%)

There will be 2 homework assignments, spread out over the course of the semester. These assignments will draw on the course materials, but also involve a substantive creative and/or analytical component. You'll be asked, among other things, to:

- work on (or even collect, when applicable) linguistic data;
- provide an analysis of these data through the lenses of the concepts introduced in class;
- read original research papers and engage with their content via reaction papers;
- or a combination of all these.

Specific guidelines and support will be provided for each assignment. A tentative schedule of the deadlines for the homework assignments is provided below (subject to change; check Canvas to be sure!). A few extra notes:

- All assignments and papers must be submitted in .pdf format on Canvas.
- Assignments are due by 11:59 pm on their listed due date, unless stated otherwise.
- Typed assignments are strongly preferred. However, if you find it easiest to take a picture of your completed assignment (if you've written it on paper, and it's legible) and upload it, that would be fine, as long as you submit it in pdf form.
- Check the course calendar on the syllabus for due dates, but be aware that this schedule may be subject to change. Deadlines and important dates will be uploaded on Canvas as the course progresses. Timely announcements will be sent out!

Late policy: Late assignments will be accepted, but will lose **20%** of the total score possible on the assignment for every day late. This is to encourage you to do the assignments, as it is far preferable to work through the material late rather than never. If you submit a late assignment, please email both the instructor and the TA, so that your assignment will be graded.

5.3 2 Short Exams (30%)

There will be 2 in-class exams, weighted equally. The exam will include a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks and short essay questions and will be preceded by a dedicated review session. You'll be able to consult your notes and the textbook during the exam, but won't be able to access the internet. The exams are generally non-cumulative. However, note that while you won't specifically be asked questions about earlier portions of the course in quizzes later in the semester, knowledge obtained in the earlier parts of the course may be relevant to later parts of the course. The content of the exams will bear on the lectures and the articles we discussed.

5.4 Engagement and participation (10%)

- You are generally expected to attend all classes and participate in any classroom discussions/activities
- Engagement itself will be measured via Poll Everywhere. In most classes there will be a question that I will raise during class that you will be expected to answer via Poll Everywhere, and it will draw on the readings or material covered, or potentially your experiences as they relate to the material being covered in class. Giving an answer will be considered sufficient, as long as there is a clear bona-fide effort to engage with the question. I recognize that this will not cover all ways of being engaged, so there will be a little wiggle room here, such that further participation outside of this can also bolster this part of your grade, if you happen to miss answering some of the Poll Everywhere questions, for example.
- Being absent for up to a few (e.g. 3) Poll Everywhere questions will not negatively impact your grade

5.5 Extra credit

You will have the chance to earn extra credit in this course via participation in an experiment through the Linguistics and Cognitive Science Department or an alternative assignment. More information about this will be sent out in the first few weeks of the semester.

5.6 Grading Scale

Students will be assigned the following letter grade based on the calculation coming from the course assessment section.

- A: 93.0 and above
- A-: 90.0 to < 93.0
- B+: 87.0 to <90.0
- B: 83.0 to <87.0
- B-: 80.0 to <83.0
- C+: 77.0 to <80.0
- C: 73.0 to <77.0
- C-: 70.0 to <73.0
- D+: 67.0 to <70.0
- D: 63.0 to <67.0
- D-: 60.0 to <63.0
- F: <60.0

Grading notes:

- Please note that rounding up for the final grade will be done at the discretion of the instructor, and should not be automatically assumed.
- Please do **not** assume the final grade as automatically calculated by Canvas is your actual final grade. These are not necessarily accurate, as they may not include all portions of your grade or be weighted appropriately. Percentages earned (not number of points earned) on assignments and exams are what is figured into your final grade, and this may not be accurately reflected on Canvas in their final grade computations.

6 Tentative Course Calendar (subject to change!)

A tentative schedule is posted below. Please see Canvas for details and official deadlines. This is just to give you a sense of the plan for the class. Relevant materials, guidelines and instructions will be published as the courses progresses and each deadline approaches.

Week	Topic	Date	Notes	Important deadlines
Week 1	Introduction	Aug 28	Lecture	
		Aug 30	Lecture	
	Development across grammatical domains			
Week 2	Pre-verbal communication	Sep 2	No class! (Labor Day)	
		Sep 4	Lecture	
		Sep 6	Deep Dive!	
Week 3	Sounds: phonetic/phonological development	Sep 9	Lecture	
		Sep 11	Lecture	
		Sep 13	Deep Dive!	
Week 4	Words and lexical development: part 1	Sep 16	Lecture	
		Sep 18	Deep Dive!	
		Sep 20	No class! (Away for a conference)	
Week 5	Words and lexical development: part 2	Sep 23	Lecture	Response paper 1 due!
		Sep 25	Lecture	
		Sep 27	Deep Dive!	Homework 1 assigned!
Week 6	Meaning in Context: Pragmatic development	Sep 30	Lecture	
		Oct 2	Lecture	
		Oct 4	Deep Dive!	
Week 7	Word structure: morphological development	Oct 7	Lecture	Homework 1 due!
		Oct 9	Lecture	
		Oct 11	Victor Gomez' guest lecture	
Week 8	Sentence structure: syntactic development	Oct 14	Lecture	
		Oct 16	Lecture	
		Oct 18	Sarah Payne's guest lecture	
Week 9	Review and Exam	Oct 21	Review	Response paper 2 due!
		Oct 23	In-class Exam 1	
		Oct 25	No class! (mid-semester relief)	
	Theories of development/acquisition			
Week 10	Part 1	Oct 28	Lecture	
		Oct 30	Lecture	
		Nov 1	Deep Dive!	
Week 11	Part 2	Nov 4	Lecture	
		Nov 6	Lecture	
		Nov 8	Deep Dive!	
Week 12	Part 3	Nov 11	Lecture	Homework 2 assigned!
		Nov 13	Lecture	
		Nov 15	Deep Dive!	
	Bonus topics			
Week 13	Learning to judge others – aka, the development of social evaluation skills	Nov 18	Lecture	Homework 2 due!
		Nov 20	Lecture	
		Nov 22	Deep Dive!	
Week 14	Does parents' input matter? Understanding the 30 million words gap	Dec 2	Lecture	
		Dec 4	Deep Dive!	
		Dec 6	Review	
Week 15		Dec 9	In class Exam 2	
Exam Week				Response paper 3 due! (Exact date TBD)

7 Course Policy Document

7.1 Course Specific Policies

7.1.1 Attendance

You are generally expected to attend each class. Please keep in mind that in the event that you miss class, you are still responsible for any assignments due and material covered during your absence. (Please refer to UD's attendance policy.)

As per the University's attendance policies, absences on religious holidays listed in university calendars are recognized as an excused absence. Nevertheless, students are urged to remind the instructor of their intention to be absent on a particular upcoming holiday. Absences on religious holidays not listed in university calendars, as well as absences due to athletic participation or other extracurricular activities in which students are official representatives of the university, shall be recognized as excused absences when the student informs the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of the semester of these planned absences for the semester.

7.1.2 Missed assignments/late work/makeup policy

Late assignments will generally be graded according to the policy stated in Section 5.2. In the event that you are sick or have an emergency leading up to the due date and cannot notify me in advance, I will work with you within reason to find an alternate due date. Please note that this is at the discretion of the instructor, and there may be times when it is impossible to extend a due date.

7.1.3 AI usage policy

All the assignments and materials for this course have been designed such that students can successfully and profitably engage with them **without the use of AI tools** (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2). In fact, I generally recommend that you do not make use of these tools. The reason motivating this recommendation is mainly concerned with the educational goals of the class. In particular, a key component of the course – and of studying linguistics more broadly – is learning how to reason about linguistic data, and propose analyses or informed discussions of these data. Outsourcing this reasoning to ChatGPT – or equivalent AI tool – might seem like an effective shortcut to submit strong assignments with little effort. However, it's likely to backfire for a number of reasons, including the following:

- AI tools rarely admit their limitations; as a result, their output is often inaccurate, imprecise, or altogether wrong – and this requires careful editing and revision on the part of a student. This often offsets the gain in time and energy afforded by these tools
- Homework assignments provide a key opportunity to prepare for the in-class exams; if you use ChatGPT to respond to the homework questions, you'll have a harder time in responding to questions in the in-class exam, in which the use of these tools won't be allowed;

With that being said, you are allowed to use these tools in assignments in this course **if that use is properly documented and credited**. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: "Chat-GPT-3. (YYYY, Month DD of query). "Text of your query."

Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/> Material generated using other tools should follow a similar citation convention.

In addition, If a tool is used in an assignment, **you must also include a brief (2-3 sentences) description of how you used the tool** – e.g., what specific tool was used, what prompt and settings were used to generate material, and how that material was incorporated into the assignment.

You are **not** allowed, under any circumstance, to submit content generated by an AI program as your own. Any violation of this policy will be considered cheating and/or plagiarism, and will be dealt with severely under relevant UD policies.

Note: if I suspect use of undocumented AI, I reserve the right to ask the student to meet with you in person to answer a few short questions about the content of what they have written in the assignment. If you not used AI (other than what you have documented according to the above policy), you should be able to answer these with no problems. I also reserve the right to involve the [Community Standards and Conflict Resolution \(CSCR\)](#) center to investigate the case further.

7.1.4 Communication

- I try to respond to e-mails the same day, often within a few hours. However, I will often delay responding to e-mails received during the evening hours and and/or weekends and holidays until the next working day;
- Class announcements will go out via Canvas, so please make sure you have e-mail alerts set up so that you don't miss them, and be sure to check your e-mail and Canvas regularly.
- If you have any questions regarding the material or class, feel free to contact me or the Teaching Assistants.

7.1.5 Student Mental Health & Wellbeing

In addition to impacting your overall well being, diminished mental health can interfere with optimal academic performance. If this course is causing or contributing significant mental or emotional stress, then please reach out to me directly. However, problems with other parts of your life can also contribute to decreased academic performance. UD's [Center for Counseling & Student Development \(CCSD\)](#) provides cost-free and confidential mental health services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your emotional or academic well-being. Remember, getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do – for yourself and for those who care about you.

In addition, I strongly encourage you to pay attention to the following guidelines:

- If you are struggling with this class, please check-in during office hours or contact me by email at beltrama@udel.edu. If you feel more comfortable, you can also contact or meet with any of the Teaching Assistants. Please keep in communication with us regarding any issues you are having. If we don't know what's going on that may prevent you from succeeding, we can't help!
- If you are struggling in multiple classes, unsure whether you are making the most of your time at UD, or unsure what academic resources are available at UD, check-in with your academic advisor

- Additional resources:
 - **CCSD** is open and available remotely, and 24/7 mental health support remains available on the UD Helpline at 302-831-1001 for any student in need of someone to talk to. Visit CCSD's website for additional information and resources.
 - **UD's Crisis Text Line:** text "UDTEXT" or "STEVE" at 741741 for students of color to connect with confidential text message support.
 - **Division of Student Life:** Explore the [Student Life's Wellbeing webpage](#) for a comprehensive listing of well-being resources, activities and services available to all students.

7.2 UD Academic Policies

7.2.1 The Safety of Our Learning Environment

Student learning can only occur when students and their instructors feel safe, respected, and supported by each other. To ensure that our learning environment is as safe as possible, you are expected to abide by the most up-to-date University of Delaware's [COVID-19 Guidelines](#)

7.2.2 Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with UD policies regarding academic dishonesty. To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, to re-submit the same assignment for different classes, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. Complete details of the university's academic integrity policies and procedures can be found at <https://www.udel.edu/students/community-standards/>; e-mail: communitystandards@udel.edu

7.2.3 Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

The University of Delaware works to promote an academic and work environment that is free from all forms of discrimination, including harassment and sexual misconduct. As a member of the community, your rights, resources and responsibilities are reflected in the Non-Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, and Title IX policy. Please familiarize yourself with this policy at the [University's Office of Equity & Inclusion's website](#). You can report any concerns to the University's Office of Equity & Inclusion (302) 831-8063 or at titleixcoordinator@udel.edu. You can report anonymously through UD Police (302) 831-2222 or the [EthicsPoint Compliance Hotline](#).

- Read the [full policy](#)
- [File a report](#)

7.2.4 Faculty Statement on Disclosures of Instances of Sexual Misconduct

If, at any time during this course, I happen to be made aware that a student may have been the victim of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic/dating violence,

or stalking), I am a responsible employee, which means I am directed to report any incident of sexual harassment or misconduct to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator will then meet with the student to discuss how the University will respond to the report and the student's rights and options, to offer resources, and to ensure that the student and the campus community are safe. If such a situation is disclosed to me in class, in a paper assignment, or in office hours, I promise to protect your privacy—I will not disclose the incident to anyone but the Title IX Coordinator in a confidential manner. For more information on Sexual Misconduct policies, where to get help, and reporting information, please refer to www.udel.edu/sexualmisconduct. You can also send an email to the Title IX Coordinator at titleixcoordinator@udel.edu. At UD, we provide 24/7/365 crisis assistance and victim advocacy and counseling. Contact 302-831-1001 to get in touch with a sexual offense support advocate, as well as confidential and anonymous counseling services for other concerns.

7.2.5 Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student who may need disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Support Services (DSS) office as soon as possible. For more information, please visit [Getting Registered at DSS](http://www.udel.edu/dss). Contact DSS by phone: 302-831-4643; fax: 302-831-3261; website: www.udel.edu/dss; email: dssoffice@udel.edu; or visit 240 Academy Street, Alison Hall Suite 130 during business hours (8-5 M-F).

7.2.6 Non-Discrimination

The University of Delaware does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital status, disability, religion, age, veteran status or any other characteristic protected by applicable law in its employment, educational programs and activities, admissions policies, and scholarship and loan programs as required by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable statutes and University policies. The University of Delaware also prohibits unlawful harassment including sexual harassment and sexual violence.

For inquiries or complaints related to non-discrimination policies, please contact: Office of Equity & Inclusion- oei@udel.edu, (302) 831-8063.

For complaints related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact: Office of Disability Support Services, dssoffice@udel.edu, Alison Hall, Suite 130, Newark, DE 19716 (302) 831-4643 OR contact the [U.S. Department of Education - Office for Civil Rights](#)