This graduate course takes a deep look at how children learn language. The focus is on the processes, methods, and mechanisms a child may use to discover the syntactic/semantic structure of their native language. In analogy, we examine the ways kids cover ground rather than elaborating the territory covered and the landmarks they pass in learning language.

The study of language acquisition involves ideas originating in philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and even computer science. Neurology is also involved but as yet we don't know how to specify causal links for normal language acquisitional processes. We'll organize our study in a roughly chronological sequence; examining what people thought about how kids learn language circa 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990.

I assume you know basic English grammar (as in ePsy 230), have studied language development in general and had a first glimpse at some theories of it (as in ePsy 330).

This course addresses several specific topics...
1) the nature of theories and models applied to language acquisition
2) nativist vs. empiricist views of language acquisition
3) traditional grammatical description of language (as can be applied to kids)
4) historically significant models for acquisition of grammar
   a. primitive & behaviorist explanations
   b. transformational generative grammar
   c. cognitivist-inductionist models
5) Current major theories & models of language acquisition
   a. Government-Binding theory/ parameter setting
   b. learnability theory
   c. the Competition & PDP models

Texts
Two texts we'll use in depth are for sale in the BYU bookstore:
We'll also do quite a few other readings, given on a forthcoming list. These readings will be on reserve in the ASLP secretaries' office.
Class Participation
Complete the assigned reading before each class to be ready to present and discuss part of that day's readings.

I expect attendance and class participation. If you can't attend this class you should not be enrolled for it. Hire a babysitter for your children; don't bring them to class. Watching the class from the observation hall does not count as attending the class. I'll lower your grade if you're absent more than two times by the percentage of class time you've missed. Borrowing notes is a nuisance to other students and is no substitute for your own encoding and discussion of class material. Eating and drinking in class is okay except for noisy or odiferous things such as Corn Nuts or Fritos. Sleeping in class or privately conversing with a friend is totally gauche.

Paper
The instructional aim of this class is for you to come to understand several theories about how children learn language, and to begin to use these theories to critique, explain, and select among clinical language approaches. I think that such understanding would be better evaluated by how you can discuss the theories in reflective writing rather than through examination writing, so that's what you'll be doing.

Your paper should (a) clearly explain the theories/ideas on language acquisition that we read and discuss in class, (b) discuss the implications that these theories/ideas hold for language assessment and intervention, and (c) discuss and justify your own view on how children learn language. Part (a) will be understandably long. You may mix part (b) in with part (a), or have it a separate section. Part (c) will be under 4 pages long (unless you develop and justify a new theory). Do not use direct quotations of more than 10 words in length unless the source was published before 1900. Use APA style for referencing.

I'm willing to read, critique, and assign a tentative grade to one draft of your paper (as well as to the finished version). Turning in this draft is optional but must be no less than one week before the final draft is due; expect 3 school days for turn-around time. The final draft is due by 5 p.m. on April 7 (Thursday). In class on Tuesday April 12th class members will share synopses of the findings and summaries made and of the conclusions they've reached.

I'll grade the papers using the scale at the end of the G. E. booklet Standards for Student Papers, with extra weight placed on completeness of content.

Semester Grading
Semester grades will be based 80% on the paper and 20% on class participation (which includes class attendance & preparation and involvement in discussion).