

## Language and Mind

Elective class, 2nd semester, 2025-2026

The class discusses topics related to first language acquisition and child cognitive development from the interdisciplinary perspective of biolinguistics at an introductory level. It covers the following core aspects:

- The Language Faculty
- How Universal Grammar contributes to language acquisition
- The Critical Period Hypothesis
- The autonomy of syntax (linguistic modularity)
- What does an impossible human language look like?
- Is there a relationship between motor and cognitive development and language acquisition?

The presentations connect theoretical concepts and famous case studies that illustrate them. I approach the Critical Period hypothesis in relation to research by Susan Curtiss, who presents the consequences of deprivation of linguistic input in the cases of Genie (Curtiss, 1977) and Chelsea (Curtiss, 2014). The dissociation between cognitive and linguistic development is exemplified by the studies on Christopher (Smith & Tsimpli, 1995), Laura (Yamada, 1990) and Anthony (Curtiss, 1981). All of them feature people with moderate and mild intellectual disability, but with a sound linguistic capacity that ensured full first language acquisition.