

Second Language Learning Theories

Syllabus - Spring 2026

Week 1; March 7 - Introductions

Introductions to the course, to the materials, assignments, and everything else.

In this the first week of the class we introduce the theme of second language learning. We will discuss the brief history of SLA as a separate field of study and the approaches taken in SLA. As a means of showing how SLA often works, we will go over 'Milestones in Motor and Language Development' From *Language Files* 8, pp. 278-280 and see how we can interpret the data presented there.

Homework: Read the required articles.

Week 2; March 14 – Native and Non-Native Speakers

We start our exploration of SLA themes by addressing the issue of the native speaker. The concept of the idealized native speaker has had a profound effect on SLA research and indeed thought and feelings about language development and use. Despite this there is no functioning working definition of a native speaker. It, therefore, seems that this is a central issue that will color our exploration of other areas of concern as we move through this course.

Readings

Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(2), 185-209.

Cook, V. (2016). Where is the native speaker now?. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(1), 186-189.

Lee, J. J. (2005). The native speaker: An achievable model. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(2), 152-163.

Seidlhofer, B. (2005). English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal* 59(4), 339-341.

Timmis, I. (2002). Native-speaker norms and international English: A classroom view. *ELT Journal*, 56(3): 240-249.

Vulchanova, M., Vulchanov, V., Sorace, A., Suarez-Gomez, C., & Guijarro-Fuentes, P. (2022). The notion of the native speaker put to the test: Recent research advances. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 875740.

Additional readings (optional)

Aneja, G. A. (2016). (Non)native speakerhood: Rethinking (non)nativeness and teacher identity in TESOL teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 572-596.

Davies, A. (2004). The native speaker in applied linguistics. In A. Davies and C. Elder. (eds.). *The handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 431-450). Oxford: Blackwell.

Han, Z. (2004). To be a native speaker means not to be a nonnative speaker'. *Second Language Research*, 20(2), 166-187.

Koike, D. and Liskin-Gasparro, J. E. (2003). Privilege of the nonnative speaker meets practical needs of the language teacher. *The Sociolinguistics of Foreign-Language Classrooms*, 263-266.

Kramsch, C. (1997). The privilege of the nonnative speaker. *PMLA*, 112(3), 356-369.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect upon the idea of the native speaker.

Week 3; March 21 – L1 versus L2 learning: Innateness

This week we explore the idea of innateness as being one of the chief differences between L1 and L2 learning. The idea of innateness is closely tied into the concept of Universal Grammar (UG). In our discussion we will, therefore, look first at the different proposals regarding possible access to UG in subsequent language learning. We will also look briefly at modern proposals regarding UG and its possible role in L2 learning. This centers around a discussion of Chomsky's proposed differences between i-language and e-language. Finally, we question the idea of innateness for language in general.

Readings

Bybee, J. (2010). *Language, usage and cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-13.

- Chomsky, N. (1986). *Knowledge of language*. Westport, CN.: Praeger, pp. 19-24.
- Cook, V. and Newson, M. (1996). Chomsky's universal grammar (2nd Edition). Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 291-297.
- Dąbrowska, E. (2015). What exactly is Universal Grammar, and has anyone seen it?. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 852.
- Hawkins, R. (2008). The nativist perspective on second language acquisition. *Lingua*, 118(4), 465-477.
- O'Grady, W. (2008). Innateness, universal grammar, and emergentism. *Lingua*, 118: 620-631.
- Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on the idea of innateness in language and SLA.

Week 4; March 28 – L1 versus L2 learning: Age effects

This week we go over the issue of age-related issues in second language learning. Age issues are often thought to be limited to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), but, as recent research has shown, the CPH is largely disproven in its strong form. Age effects are an undeniable variable, but they are both positive and negative and like almost everything else we find in our exploration of the phenomenon of language learning highly variable. The variable of age is being included in this course not just because it is an important issue worldwide but because there is a large amount of misunderstanding about age effects in large part because people have taken the CPH at face value and not read more up-to-date treatments of the issue.

Readings

- Abrahamsson, N. (2012). Age of onset and nativelike L2 ultimate attainment of morphosyntactic and phonetic intuition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 34(2), 187-214.
- Bialystok, E. (1997). The structure of age: In search of barriers to second language acquisition. *Second Language Research* 13(2): 116-137.
- Birdsong, D. and Molis, M. (2001). On the evidence for maturational constraints in second-language acquisition. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 44: 235-249.
- Chiswick, B. and Miller, P. (2008). A test for the critical period hypothesis for language learning. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 29(19): 16-29.
- Singleton, D., & Leśniewska, J. (2021). The critical period hypothesis for L2 acquisition: An unfalsifiable embarrassment?. *Languages*, 6(3), 149.
- Yusa, N., Koizumi, M., Kim, J., Kimura, N., Uchida, S., Yokoyama, S., ... & Hagiwara, H. (2011). Second-language instinct and instruction effects: Nature and nurture in second-language acquisition. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 23(10), 2716-2730.

Additional readings (optional)

- Qureshi, M. A. (2016). A meta-analysis: Age and second language grammar acquisition. *System* 60, 147–160.
- Slabakova, R. (2009). L2 FUNDAMENTALS. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(2), 155–173.
- Tomiya, M. (2000) Child second language attrition: A longitudinal case study. *Applied Linguistics* 21/3: 304–332.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on the issue of age effects in SLA.

Week 5; April 4 – L1 versus L2 learning: Transfer

We start our exploration of issues in second language learning by exploring the controversies surrounding the differences and similarities between first and second, what I like to term subsequent, language learning. This week we look specifically at the idea of transfer. We will examine the early studies focusing on negative transfer, but will focus our attention on the more recent studies of positive transfer. The basic idea is that subsequent language learning is fundamentally different from first language learning in that there is a wealth of knowledge already in place that can and should be transferred. This means, in theory, that learning and additional language should be easier than the first one. It also means that we cannot and should not teach a second language without consideration of the other language(s) a learner has.

Readings

- Bu, J. (2012). A Study of Relationships between L1 Pragmatic Transfer and L2 Proficiency. *English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 32-43.
- Ma, B. (2013). What is the Role of L1 in L2 Acquisition?. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 7(2), 31.
- Sparks, R., Patton, J., Ganschow, L., & Humbach, N. (2009). Long-term crosslinguistic transfer of skills from

L1 to L2. *Language Learning*, 59(1), 203-243.

Wardhaugh, R. (1970). The contrastive analysis hypothesis. *TESOL Quarterly* 4(2): 123-130.

Yi, A. (2012). On the Factors Influencing L1 Transfer. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 2(11).

Additional readings (optional)

Crompton, P. (2011). Article errors in the English writing of advanced L1 Arabic learners: The role of transfer. *Asian EFL Journal. Professional Teaching Articles* 50: 4-34.

Gomez, C. and R. Reason. (2002). Cross-linguistic transfer of phonological skills: A Malaysian perspective. *Dyslexia* 8: 2-33.

Pavlenko, A. and Jarvis, S. (2002). Bidirectional transfer. *Applied Linguistics* 23(2): 190-214.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on the nature and usefulness of transfer.

Week 6; April 11 – Memory systems (types)

This week we go over the different types of memory system and their effects on the second language learning process. The basic idea is that the different types of memory function differently, even though they affect each other as shall be addressed in the following week. Each one has its own functions (purposes) and ways of working. It, therefore, behooves language teachers to develop a basic understanding of these different systems and how they work in general and in relation to language so we can help our students learn better.

Readings

Barak, O., & Tsodyks, M. (2014). Working models of working memory. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 25, 20-24.

Ferbinteanu, J. (2019). Memory systems 2018–Towards a new paradigm. *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, 157, 61-78.

Henke, K. (2010). A model for memory systems based on processing modes rather than consciousness. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 11(7), 523-532.

Henson, R. N., & Gagnepain, P. (2010). Predictive, interactive multiple memory systems. *Hippocampus*, 20(11), 1315-1326.

Kail, R. and Hall, L. (2001). Distinguishing short-term from working memory. *Memory and Cognition* 29(1): 1-9.

Terry, W. (2000). *Learning and memory* (3rd Edition). Boston: Pearson, pp. 193-219.

Additional readings (optional)

Baddeley, A. (2003). Working memory and language: An overview. *Journal of Communication Disorders* 36: 189-208.

Gruber, O. and Groschke, T. (2004). Executive control emerging from dynamic interactions between brain systems mediating language, working memory and attentional processes. *Acta Psychologica* 115: 105-121.

Kormos, J. and Sáfár, A. (2008). Phonological short-term memory, working memory and foreign language performance in intensive language learning. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 11(2): 261-271.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on memory systems and how they affect second language development.

Week 7; April 18 – Memory systems (processes)

This week we continue with the issue of memory in second language learning. We week we focus on the processes of memory and how they are involved in the second language learning process. Encoding memories is not just something that happens in the way the teacher would like. There are many different stages and aspects related to the encoding of memories and each of them plays an important role in the entire process. It is, therefore, important for language teachers to develop ideas about these processes. After all, for something to be learned it needs to be stored in memory in one way or another. How something is stored can make all the difference.

Readings

Blumenfeld, R. and Ranganath, C. (2007). Prefrontal cortex and long-term memory encoding: An integrative review of findings from neuropsychology and neuroimaging. *The Neuroscientist* 13(3): 280-291.

Heredia, R. R., & García, E. A. (2017). Bilingual Episodic Memory Processes. *Psychology of Bilingualism*:

The Cognitive and Emotional World of Bilinguals, 137-156.

Hulstijn, J. (2002). Towards a unified account of the representation, processing and acquisition of second language knowledge. *Second Language Research* 18, 3: 193-223.

Ullman, M. T., & Lovelett, J. T. (2018). Implications of the declarative/procedural model for improving second language learning: The role of memory enhancement techniques. *Second language research*, 34(1), 39-65.

Additional readings (optional)

Egi, T. (2004). Verbal reports, noticing, and SLA research. *Language Awareness* 13(4): 243-264.

Horton, W. (2005). Conversational common ground and memory processes in language production. *Discourse Processes*, 40(1): 1-35.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on the processes of memory.

Week 8; April 25 – Complexity

This week, as we close our discussion on SLA and language in general, we look at one of the newer issues, namely that of complexity. Also called a dynamic systems approach, the idea of complexity is as the name would imply. In the complexity view language development is not a linear process that under the right conditions moves steadfastly forward. Rather language learning is a highly complex process that is affected by any number of different variables both internal and external.

Readings

De Bot, K, Lowie, W, and Verspoor, M. (2007). A dynamic systems theory approach to second language acquisition. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 10(1): 7-21.

Dörnyei, Z. (2014). Researching complex dynamic systems: 'Retrodictive qualitative modeling' in the language classroom. *Lang. Teach.*, 47(1): 80-91.

Hiver, P., & AL-HOORIE, A. H. (2016). A dynamic ensemble for second language research: Putting complexity theory into practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(4), 741-756.

Van Geert, P. (2008). The dynamic systems approach in the study of L1 and L2 acquisition: An introduction. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(2): 179-199.

Homework: Prepare for the midterm.

Week 9; May 2

Reading Week

This is our chance to catch up on missed work and to prepare for the mid-term project. Let's use this time well.

Week 10; May 9 – Personality

Midterm project due

This week we look at the issue of personality in language learning. Personality is a complex construct composed of many different aspects and with many different variables. In second language learning personality factors have been linked to success or failure. Such aspects as anxiety, degree of introversion and learning styles can have a large effect on how our students perform in the class.

Readings

Dewaele, J. M. (2012). Personality: Personality traits as independent and dependent variables. In *Psychology for language learning: Insights from research, theory and practice* (pp. 42-57). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

MacIntyre, P and Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 15(3): 3-26.

Pourfeiz, J. (2015). Exploring the relationship between global personality traits and attitudes toward foreign language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 186, 467-473.

Sharp, A. (2008). Personality and second language learning. *Asian social science*, 4(11), 17-25.

Veltkamp, G. M., Recio, G., Jacobs, A. M., & Conrad, M. (2013). Is personality modulated by language?. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 17(4), 496-504.

Additional readings (optional)

- Dewaele, J. and Furnham, A. (2000). Personality and speech production: A pilot study of second language learners. *Personality and Individual Differences* 28: 355–365.
- Ehrman, M., Leaver, B, and Oxford, R. (2003). A brief overview of individual differences in second language learning. *System* 31: 313–330.
- Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal* 37(3): 308–328.
- Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on how personality affects second language learning.

Week 11; May 16 – Motivation

Continuing our discussion from the previous week, we review some of the basic theories and practices related to motivation. Many people consider motivation the key factor in getting learners to succeed in the language, but research has shown that motivation is a rather difficult concept to pin down.

Readings

- Danesh, J., & Shahnazari, M. (2020). A structural relationship model for resilience, L2 learning motivation, and L2 proficiency at different proficiency levels. *Learning and Motivation*, 72, 101636.
- Farver, S. (2011). Motivation in second language learning. *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education* 7: 1-8.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Vincze, L. (2017). Positive and negative emotions underlie motivation for L2 learning. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 7(1), 61-88.
- Masgoret, A. and Gardner, R. (2003). Attitudes, motivation and second language learning: A meta-analysis of studies conducted by Gardner and associates. *Language learning* 53(1): 123-163.
- Sak, M. (2021). Understanding the role of personality in explaining L2 learners' DMC disposition. *Foreign Language Annals*, 54(2), 429-451.

Additional readings (optional)

- Cho, Y. G. (2012). The Relationship between L2 Learning Motivation and Context among Korean EFL Students. *English Teaching*, 67(1).
- Csizér, K and Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effect. *The Modern Language Journal* 89: 19–36.
- Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on motivation.

Week 12; May 23 – Metacognition/Strategies

This week we take a look at the idea of Metacognition in second language learning. We use the term metacognition here as a blanket term to encompass a wide range of reported phenomenon from awareness to strategies use. Many theorists believe that there is a strong link between awareness and success in SLA and particularly in more formal foreign language learning situations. We discuss awareness as both from the receptive and productive sides.

Readings

- Amerstorfer, C. M. (2020). The dynamism of strategic learning: Complexity theory in strategic L2 development. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 10(1), 21-44.
- Cross, J. (2015). Metacognition in L2 listening: Clarifying instructional theory and practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(4), 883-892.
- Oxford, R. (1989). Use of language learning strategies: A synthesis of studies with implications for strategy training. *System* 17(2): 235-247.
- Raofi, S., Chan, S. H., Mukundan, J., & Rashid, S. M. (2014). Metacognition and Second/Foreign Language Learning. *English Language Teaching*, 7(1), 36-49.
- Rosa, E. and Leow, R. (2004). Awareness, different learning conditions, and second language development. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 25(2): 269-292.

Additional readings (optional)

- Bardovi-Harlig, K. and Dörnyei, Z. (1999). Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly* 32(2): 233–259.

Goh, C. (2008). Metacognitive instruction for second language listening development: Theory, practice and research implications. *RELC Journal* 39(2): 188–213.

Lee, I. and Mak, P. (2018). Metacognition and metacognitive instruction in second language writing classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 52(4), 1085–1097.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on metacognition and awareness.

Week 13; May 30 - Input

This week we go over the idea of input and question whether comprehensible input is enough. Certainly, input is a necessary aspect of learning anything and especially language, but the question is whether input (even good input) is enough. This leads to the further question of what type and how much input is necessary.

Readings

Ellis, N., & Collins, L. (2009). Input and second language acquisition: The roles of frequency, form, and function introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(3), 329-335.

Harrington, M and Dennis, S. (2002). Input-driven language learning. *SSLA*, 24: 261-268.

Mushait, S., & Mohsen, M. A. (2019). Is Listening Comprehension a Comprehensible Input for L2 Vocabulary Acquisition. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(6), 76-84

Oh, S. (2001). Two types of input modification and EFL reading comprehension: Simplification versus elaboration. *TESOL Quarterly* 35(1): 69-96.

Wei, R., & Fan, L. (2022). On-Screen Texts in Audiovisual Input for L2 Vocabulary Learning: A Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 904523.

Additional readings (optional)

Ellis, N. C., and Wulff, S. (2020). Usage-based approaches to L2 acquisition. In S. Wulff, B. VanPatten, & G. D. Keating (eds). *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 63–82). London: Routledge.

Leow, R. P. (2009). Input enhancement and L2 grammatical development: What the research reveals. In S. L. Katz and J. Watzinger-Tharp (eds.). *Conceptions of L2 grammar: Theoretical application in the L2 classroom* (pp. 16–34). Boston: Heinle Cengage learning.

Matsumura, S. (2003). Modeling the relationships among interlanguage pragmatic development, L2 proficiency, and exposure to L2. *Applied Linguistics* 24(4): 465–491.

Rodrigo, V., Krashen, S., and Gribbons, B. (2004). The effectiveness of two comprehensible-input approaches to foreign language instruction at the intermediate level. *System* 32: 53–60.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on the role of input.

Week 14; June 6 – Output/Interaction (Holiday – Memorial Day)

This week we take a rather quick look at the issue of output in general and interaction. Within the field of SLA this has been one of the biggest issues of the last few years and is having a large impact on teaching approaches to second and especially foreign languages.

Readings

Duong, P. T., Montero Perez, M., Desmet, P., & Peters, E. (2021). Differential effects of input-based and output-based tasks on L2 vocabulary learning. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 24(3), 120-144.

Izumi, S. (2003) Comprehension and production processes in second language learning: in search of the psycholinguistic rationale of the output hypothesis. *Applied Linguistics* 24/2: 168-196.

Rassaei, E. (2017). Effects of three forms of reading-based output activity on L2 vocabulary learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(1), 76-95.

Tavares, V. (2019). A review of peer interaction and second language learning for ELL students in academic contexts. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheurs et chercheurs en éducation*, 10(2).

Thwaites, P. (2014). Maximizing learning from written output. *ELT journal*, 68(2), 135-144.

Additional readings (optional)

Masaki, K. (2015). Using Chants and Gestures to Develop Third Graders' L2 English Accent Placement Skills. *Language Education & Technology*, 52, 227–256.

Watson-Gegeo, K. and Nielsen, S. (2003). Language socialization in SLA. In C. Doughty and M. Long. (eds.). *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 155–177). Oxford: Blackwell.

Wu, H., & Ekstam, J. M. (2021). Beyond parroting: Using English fun dubbing to improve English oral performance. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 44(2), 203–218.

Homework: Read the required articles and reflect on output and interaction.

Week 15; June 13 - Variability

This week we return to the issue of differences between L1 and L2 learning and address the issue of variability. In this case we are looking in variability in the forms that people produce rather than the processes of learning. This is an important issue in SLA because it ties in with the issue of ultimate achievement/development in SLA. The idea is that all speakers of a language (even native speakers) vary their language but the issue for non-native speakers in the SLA tradition is whether this variation is planned or not. Further, the issue of systematicity in variation is of concern in SLA.

Readings

Ellis, R. (1999). Item versus system learning: Explaining free variation. *Applied Linguistics* 20(4): 460-480.

Huang, T., Steinkrauss, R., & Verspoor, M. (2021). Variability as predictor in L2 writing proficiency. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 52, 100787.

Verspoor, M., Lowie, W., and van Dijk, M. (2008). Variability in second language development from a dynamic systems perspective. *The Modern Language Journal* 92: 214-231.

Additional readings (optional)

Adamson, H.D. and Elliot Jr., O. (1997). Sources of variation in interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 35(2): 87–98.

Rahimpour, M. (2007). Task complexity and variation in L2 learner's oral discourse.

✓ **Final Project**: The final project will be a continuation of the midterm project. The tentative due date is June 20th.