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Second Language Learning Theories
Policy - Spring 2026

Overview

There is a fundamental link between theories and practices in language teaching with the former supposed to inform or even determine the latter. But, still, we do not have a complete or even sufficient model of second language development in the field of SLA. Rather what we have are a series of often conflicting theories and piecemeal ideas related to second language learning that often disagree. This three-hour-per-week course, therefore, is designed to provide language teachers/students with a comprehensive overview of some of the main issues associated with second language learning. After a brief introduction to the form and purpose of language in general, we will be focusing in turn on different issues identified and investigated by leading researchers related to the question of how second languages are learned and what affects this. In addition, a strong connection will be made between specific issues in SLA and certain language teaching approaches/methodologies, focusing more specifically on the connections between theories and practices in second language and foreign language situations. By the end of the course, students should have been exposed to not only a wide overview of issues related to second language learning but also how these different issues have been and can be used to generate specific teaching approaches and practices in the foreign language classroom.

Objectives: This course has three main objectives: to provide the students with a well-rounded and comprehensive view of the current state of research regarding issues important in the field of SLA. Students will also need to form a clear set of associations between specific second language learning issues and classroom teaching practices by analyzing the specific repercussions of such issues on practice. In the end, this newly found knowledge is intended to help students/teachers better develop and control their own ideas in relation to language acquisition/learning specifically for their own situation; and to get them to have a better understanding of how language and language acquisition works in general through a focus on key ideas.

Texts and Materials

There is no main textbook for this, although many texts will be loaded in Snowboard for the students' perusal. Instead, we will review different articles centered around a certain issue related to second language learning each week. Essentially, these different articles will serve as our textbook and students are expected to read through each of the articles. Articles will be made available to the students through Snowboard and most of them are also available through the library.

Winter Reading: There is a short, very simple text that will help the students get into the spirit of the course and which should be read over the winter break.

Brown, S. and Larson-Hall, J. (2012). *Second language acquisition myths*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Presentations: In this class students will be doing brief presentations from the following text:

Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008). *Lessons from good language learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The presentations will be based on one of the chapters from the book. As such students are expected to get this book. Each will be 10 to 15 minutes. The logistics for how this will be arranged will be determined at the course begin.

Both of these books are available in the class Snowboard page. For the Winter Reading, students can search for it themselves or email and ask me for a copy.

Methodology

English Only: The working language of this class is English. This means all official aspects of the course including all assignments, presentations and in-class discussion will be conducted in English only. As this is a multilingual classroom, students are expected to follow international standards on language use and sensitivity. Failure to do so will result in a lower participation grade.

Classroom: Various approaches will be employed in the classroom. Direct lecturing will kept to a minimum while group discussion, in-class activities, presentations, and direct and indirect questioning will be stressed. Remember students, the classroom is supposed to serve as a model. Be critical and observant of what your instructor does.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes. Two or more absences will result in a significantly lowered final grade. Being late twice is counted as an absence. Arriving more than half an hour late is also counted as an absence. There is no such thing as an excused absence and missed work should be made up. Students themselves are responsible for all material covered and assigned in class during their absence. If you are going to be absent and know it beforehand, make sure you contact your teacher as far in advance as possible.

Assignments

Homework: Students will be given homework for each class. The homework will most typically involve reading the assigned texts and writing reflections related to those readings. All assignments, unless otherwise indicated, are to be posted into Snowboard on or before the assigned date. Students will have not only the texts but also my own write ups to scaffold their reflections. Use all available resources and reflect as formally and deeply as possible.

Presentations: Each student will do at least one short 10-15 minute presentation in the class. Presentations will come from specific chapter in Griffiths (2008). Students will be presenting individually or in pairs depending on how many people are in the class.

Projects

Midterm Project: The midterm project is due in the 10th week of class (May 9th). It will take the form of a project and there will be several different options from which students can choose. Specific information about each of the options will be provided early on in the course, giving the students several weeks to contemplate and work on the midterm project.

Final Project: The final project involves revision and extension of the midterm project. This means that students must carefully select their project. After receiving the midterm back with comments students need to meet with the professor to discuss the revisions and how they can extend the project. The final project is due at the symposium on June 20th.

Grades: Final grades will be based on performance in the following categories.

Assignments	30%
Participation	20%
Presentation	10%
Midterm Project	10%
Final Project	30%

Important Notes

- Late assignments will not be accepted for marks and missed in class work cannot be made up. If, however, you know in advance that you will be late or absent make sure you contact the teacher and maybe something can be worked out.
- The penalty for plagiarism and cheating is automatic failure. Don't try it.

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Grading Policy

A

A grade in the A range is reserved for students who have done an excellent job in all the assessment criterion for the course. The A student has done all written assignments and with a high level of competence. She/he has contributing largely to the class through excellent performance during the class sessions. Additionally, the A student has written an excellent final project clearly exhibiting a deep knowledge of the subject. Overall, the A student has performed well in all areas of the course showing both development and dedication throughout.

B

A grade in the B range is given to students who have performed well in , but not all, of the assessment criterion established for the course. Her/his performance may have waned in one of the assessment criteria. She may have missed a class session or not performed well during class sessions or might have missed written assignments or failed to always fully complete other required tasks. Additionally, the final project may contain flaws. Overall, the B student has done a rather good job on many of the different aspects of the course, but her/his performance is lacking in some small areas.

C

A grade in the C range is given to students who have largely not performed well on several of the different assessment criterion in the course. The C student has failed to attend all scheduled classes, possibly missing several. The C student has also failed to do several of the written assignments and has not exhibited much effort or skill on the final project. Some effort has been put into the class and there is evidence of development and learning but this effort is not strong or well-focused.

F

A grade of F is reserved for students who have failed to perform across the range of assessment criterion established for the class. The F student has shown little or no development due to lack of effort and possibly skill in performing the established tasks for the class.