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Graduate School of TESOL
Second Language Learning Theories
Policy - Spring 2018

Overview

This course is going to be different from many other courses on SLA and also what we have done in the past in that it will not focus on specific theories or approaches to the very complex phenomenon of second language learning (For a neutral discussion of *approaches* to SLA see Mitchell, R. and F. Myles. (2004). *Second language learning theories* (2nd Edition). London: Arnold). The problem is that these approaches are not only confusing but also not always helpful to the language teacher. The reality is that despite all that has been researched and discussed not one of these approaches provides a comprehensive model for successful consecutive language learning. Rather, they each approach certain issues from different perspectives. It, therefore, seems that is the issues rather than the approaches that need to be addressed and that is what we are going to do in this course. This three-hour-per-week course 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 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 acquired 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 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.

Text and Materials

Main Text: There is no specific textbook that will be used for this class as a regular course book. Rather, each week there will be a set of different articles centered around a certain issue related to second language learning. Essentially, these different articles will serve as our textbook and students are expected to read each of the articles. Articles will be made available to the students through email and most of them are also available through the library.

Presentations: In this class students will be doing brief presentations from the following text: Griffiths, C. (ed.) (2008). *Lesson 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.

Winter Reading: Students are required to read one, rather simple book prior to course begin. Brown, S. and Larson-Hall, J. (2012). *Second language acquisition myths*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

This book provides a brief introduction to some of the issues we will be covering in class in a simple, accessible way. Among the different chapters (myths), students should find at least one or two myths which they find particularly compelling and which they want to focus on in their report.

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 work, 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 basically involves reading the assigned articles and answering questions related to those readings. All assignments, unless otherwise indicated, must be typed and handed in during class on the day they are due. Students will need to go to the website to get the weekly homework assignments, make sure to do so early.

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 6th). 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 18th.

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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