TESL 523 Spring 2012

Second Language Acquisition

Dr. Younghee Sheen
Thursday 5:30-8:00 pm  Location: EQB 14
Office: McCabe 211 Tel: 202-885-2247
Office hours: Wednesday 1:00-5:00 pm or by appointment
Email: sheen@american.edu

Course description

This course provides an introduction to theory and research in second language acquisition (SLA) and explores the relevance of SLA research for second language learning and teaching in a variety of contexts. A range of theoretical perspectives underlying previous and current SLA research will be examined, as well as a range of empirical classroom studies investigating the role of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback in classroom L2 learning. A range of individual differences, including age, aptitude, motivation and anxiety will be examined to consider why some L2 learners are more successful than others.

Course aims

• To familiarize students with some of the main findings from SLA research
• To develop good understanding of different theoretical perspectives on second language acquisition
• To develop informed expectations for language teaching and learning
• To examine SLA research and answer students’ own questions about individual differences and second language learning and frame new questions in the light of current research

Required text


All other required readings are made available on Blackboard (see course outline below).

The following texts are recommended for further readings for any SLA topics you might be interested in:


**Course requirements and grade evaluation**

 Attendance and class discussion participation: 10%
 Discussion Board participation: 10%
 Six chapter summary assignments: 30% (6 x 5%)
 Two article presentations: 20% (2 x 10%)
 Final paper: 25%
 Final paper presentation: 5%

**Grading Scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-85</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>75-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-74</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 70%</td>
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**Attendance and class discussion participation**

Your active participation (both on and off-line) is key to the course success. Perfect attendance for this course is expected. If you miss more than two classes (except in extraordinary circumstances), you will not be able to pass this course and your unexcused absence will result in a half grade reduction on your final grade.

**Discussion Board participation (chapter summary discussion)**

Each student will be assigned the duties of a facilitator/moderator for at least one asynchronous online blackboard discussion. The ‘facilitator’ will post a summary of the assigned chapter and 3 follow up questions for classmates to respond to by Wednesday midnight (1/26 being the first discussion). **Facilitators, please post the summary and the questions as 4 individual threads to avoid confusion.** All other students will post at least 4 responses (one per each thread) by Thursday midnight of the same week. The facilitator will manage the discussion board throughout Thursday commenting on classmates’ posts. The facilitator will then post a final summary of the discussions by Friday midnight of the same week.

Each posting (except the article summary content in itself) should be approximately between 200 to 500 words.

**Chapter summary assignment**
Write a 2-3 page, accurate, coherent, organized and well-written summary of six individual chapters assigned for each on-line session, pointing out the theoretical and/or pedagogical implications of the chapter. Each of your summaries (a total of 6) must be submitted to the instructor by its due date.

**Article presentation and discussion**

Each student will sign up for two article presentations. The articles will be closely related to the topics discussed that day in class, and each presentation involves a critical analysis of an empirical study. The presenter should provide the rest of the class with an organized, concise, and easy-to-follow handout—highlighting the major points of the presentation and providing a citation of the article(s) presented. Your handout (and presentation slides if any) must be submitted to the instructor.

In your presentation, be sure to provide an overview situating its research question(s) within the context of previous research on the topic. Briefly explain the methodology, summarize the results, and critically discuss the findings. The presenter should also discuss the implications in relation to the other readings and theories discussed in class.

At the end of the presentation, include 2-3 discussion questions which your audience can discuss in pairs or small groups. Please try to determine the most important aspects of the research/debate and be selective about what you share with the class so that you can stay within a time limit of 15 minutes for the presentation, 10 minutes for the small-group discussions, and 5 minutes for debriefing/Q&A afterwards.

An article presentation schedule will be arranged during the 1/19 session. These articles to be presented are pre-class required reading for all.

**Final paper: Analysis of a second language learner**

For this assignment, you will interview an adult L2 learner, using a structured interview that you will design and implement. A structured interview can be thought of as an oral questionnaire; you ask questions which have been formulated in advance. This is different from an open-ended interview where the interviewer begins with a general idea about what topics to discuss but allows the discourse to go off into any direction worth pursuing. You may work together with others on devising the questionnaire.

You will need to prepare a set of at least 25 questions that will provide information concerning the factors involved in your participant’s language learning experiences. Design some questions in such a way as to infer certain characteristics. Rather than only asking the learner directly to describe his or her aptitude, attitudes, motivation,
personality or learning style, ask some questions which allow you (the researcher) to confirm these characteristics through inference.

Your paper should be between 15 and 18 pages (excluding appendices) and include a 200 word abstract.

Write up a report of your results using the following format:

1. Brief introduction stating the purpose of your report and describing the data collection procedures (describe where/when/how the interview took place)
2. Description of the participant’s L2 learning history and the linguistic environment
3. Description of the relevant personal characteristics that influenced the participant’s success (or lack of success) in learning other languages
4. Discussion and conclusion
   ---Identify the most important factors (internal and/or external) in determining your participant’s success or failure in acquiring the L2. Make connections between the results of your study and those of other studies about individual differences mentioned in the readings and discussed in class. Finally, briefly identify similarities or differences between your findings and your own second language learning profile.

**Final paper presentation**

Students are required to share their SLA research findings with the class by presenting their final paper through MS PowerPoint slides for 20 minutes followed by a 5 minute Q&A. Class handouts for your presentation are encouraged.

**Academic Policies**

1. **Attendance and participation**: Please note that part of your grade will be based on class participation and attendance - If you miss more than one class (except in extraordinary circumstances), you will not be able to pass this course and your unexcused absence will result in a half grade reduction on the final.
2. **Late Work**: In fairness to students who complete their assignments in a timely manner, late work will be penalized, except under exigent circumstances brought to my attention. In the case of your final paper, any late submission will result in a half grade reduction penalty.
3. **Academic Integrity**: As students and scholars, we are held to the University’s Academic Integrity Code. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism (passing off someone else’s words, ideas, or work as your own; copying and passing from the internet; writing papers without properly citing sources, etc.) will not be tolerated under any circumstances. I am required to report cases of academic dishonesty to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), whose policy is to fail students for the course. For more information, please refer to this site: http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm.
4. **Library Support:** For assistance with conducting searches in the library databases, doing a research-based study, or familiarize yourself with APA style, students are encouraged to contact or make an appointment with Alex Hodges, the AU's TESOL librarian faculty at ext. 3845 /Email: hodges@american.edu. Also, AU library offers a variety of on-line tutorials designed to help you with your course projects. For more information on how to get research help, refer to this site: [http://www.library.american.edu/howto/researchhelp.html](http://www.library.american.edu/howto/researchhelp.html) and [http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/TESOL](http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/TESOL).

## Course outline

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings*</th>
<th>Assignments**</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/19</td>
<td>Introduction: What is ‘second language acquisition’?</td>
<td>Chapter 1 (after class reading)</td>
<td>Brief language learning and teaching bio (posted on Blackboard)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/26</td>
<td>Learner errors and error analysis</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Blackboard discussion</td>
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<td>Chang (2010): Toward a taxonomy of written errors Investigation into the written errors of Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners (TESOL Quarterly)</td>
<td>Chapter summary due</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Developmental patterns in L2 acquisition</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Article presentation # 1</td>
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<td>#1Goldschneider &amp; DeKeyser (2005): Explaining the Natural Order of L2 Morpheme Acquisition in English- A Meta-analysis of Multiple Determinants (Language Learning)</td>
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| 2/16  | Input, interaction and L2 acquisition             | Chapter 6 #2 Sheen (2010): Differential effects of oral and written corrective feedback in the ESL classroom (Studies in Second Language Acquisition) 
#3 Gass, Mackey & Ross-Feldman (2011): Task-based interactions in classroom laboratory settings (Language Learning) | Article presentation # 2 & # 3                                               |
<p>| 2/23  | Social aspects of L2 acquisition                  | Chapter 7 Norton &amp; Toohey (2011): Identity, language learning, and social change (Language Teaching) | Blackboard discussion Chapter summary due                                      |
| 3/1   | Language transfer: The role of the learners’ first language | Chapter 8 Ionin &amp; Montrul (2010): The role of L1 transfer in the interpretation of articles with definite plurals in L2 English (Language Learning) | Blackboard discussion Chapter summary due                                      |</p>
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<td>4/5</td>
<td>Individual differences and L2 acquisition (2)</td>
<td>Chapter 13 Baralt &amp; Gurzynski-Weiss (2011): Comparing learners state anxiety during task-based interaction in computer-mediated and face-to-face communication (Language Teaching Research)</td>
<td>Blackboard discussion Chapter summary due</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/12</td>
<td>Form-focused instruction and L2 acquisition (1)</td>
<td>Chapter 16 #8 Yang &amp; Lyster (2010): Effects of form-focused practice and feedback on chinese EFL learners acquisition of regular and irregular past tense forms (Studies in Second Language Acquisition)</td>
<td>Article presentation # 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>Form-focused instruction and L2 acquisition (2)</td>
<td>Chapter 16 Spada &amp; Lightbown (2008): Form-focused instruction-Isolated or integrated (TESOL Quarterly)</td>
<td>Blackboard discussion Chapter summary due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/26</td>
<td>Final paper presentation</td>
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<td>Powerpoint presentation due</td>
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<td>5/3</td>
<td>Class wrap-up Final paper in-class submission</td>
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<td>Final paper due</td>
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Bibliography


