LING 6500
Second Language Acquisition: Theory and Practice
Fall 2016

Course Description & Syllabus

Mondays, 5:00–7:30 p.m.
203 Old Main

Instructor: Dr. Joshua Thoms
Office: Main 202 J
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
E-mail: joshua.thoms@usu.edu
Department Chair: Dr. Brad Hall, Old Main 204 A

Goals of the course

The primary purpose of this course is to introduce students to historical and contemporary theoretical perspectives on second language (L2) acquisition. When necessary, data sets from different languages will be used to highlight the constructs and underlying assumptions of a number of theories. Along the way, students will be encouraged to reflect on how L2 acquisition theory informs teaching methodologies/practices in L2 instructed environments (e.g., in the classroom). We will work to achieve these goals in the following ways:

- read and discuss various articles and book chapters from the fields of second language acquisition (SLA), foreign language education, and applied linguistics;
- develop your skills as a reflective practitioner/action researcher by writing a final project that proposes a research project on a topic of your choosing that is embedded within a particular theoretical framework;
- practice your presentation skills by leading a class discussion on an article or book chapter and by presenting your final project at the end of the course to the rest of the class.

**Components of the course**

Each of the components of the course is described below.

**Readings.** This course will not use a textbook. Rather, the readings for the course will be comprised of an eclectic mix of research articles (i.e., articles that explain and report on the results of a research project), overview articles (i.e., articles that provide an overview of a research area/issue/theory), and book chapters (e.g., chapters that highlight a theoretical issue). It is imperative that you do a close reading of every assigned article or book chapter each week. Carefully reading the articles and book chapters will (a) allow you to contribute meaningfully to class discussion which will, in turn, allow you to better understand the issues being investigated or presented in the article/chapter, (b) allow you to think critically about how the research was conducted and thoughtfully question the theoretical framework used, research questions, methods, results, etc., while also contemplating how the study might inform L2 teaching, and (c) better prepare you for your final project in this course and in future courses.

**Responses to articles in class.** It is highly suggested that you take notes while doing the readings outside of class. Given that this class is a graduate course and only meets once each week, it will be necessary for you to remember the details of each article as you will often be asked to share your thoughts about what you have read. To reiterate, doing the readings and taking notes will help you to (a) better understand the chapter or article, and (b) prepare you to contribute to class discussion in a meaningful way. Your reaction/notes could contain any of the following:

* Is there a quotation from the reading that you find particularly interesting? Explain.
* What ideas discussed in the reading do you agree or disagree with? Why?
* How does the reading relate to L2 pedagogy?
* How would you apply what you have learned from this reading to your own language teaching context?

**Mid-semester exam.** One cumulative exam will be given during the mid-point of the semester. If you have been consistently doing the readings, taking notes, and actively participating in class discussions, you should do well on the exam. More information about the format of the exam will be provided to you in class.

**Leading a critical discussion of an assigned reading (with a partner).** During the course of the semester, you and another student will be asked to lead the discussion of one of the readings that appears in the syllabus. You/your partner should feel free to be creative when deciding how you want to lead the critical discussion for the given article/book chapter. You should design questions or an activity(ies) that target(s) the main components or concepts of the research article or book chapter in order to engage your fellow class members in discussion. On the day when you lead discussion, part of the class will be yours to address the main point(s) of the article and do your activity(ies). Regardless the type of article that you and your partner are assigned, you should provide an overview of the project (i.e., why was the study needed—if an empirical study)?; what theoretical framework was used (and why)?; what were the findings (again, if your article is an empirical study)?; how does
this inform L2 teaching and learning?). More information about leading a critical discussion of a reading will be provided during the course of the semester.

*Final project: Proposed research project (individually or with a partner). The main purpose of the final project is to allow you to focus on a specific topic related to L2 acquisition/learning by yourself OR with another student resulting in a review of pertinent literature, novel research questions, and a brief methodology section. The literature review section of the project can include readings from our course but will primarily involve you (and your partner, if applicable) locating and reading new articles related to your topic. The proposed research project should include the following sections: Introduction (explain why you are interested in this topic and its relevance to L2 learning and teaching); Literature Review (describe (a) the theoretical framework/perspective from which your proposed research project would be carried out, (b) empirical studies alongside pedagogically oriented work related to your topic, and (c) 2-3 clearly stated research questions that, if investigated, would fill a void in the current literature regarding your research topic. Please note that the majority of the studies that you include in your literature review should be no older than 2006, and many of them should have been published within the last 5 years); Methodology (briefly describe the research setting, information about the research participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques to be used). Again, this final project can be done individually or with a partner. More details about the final project (e.g., page length, other expectations) will be provided to you early on in the semester.

It is important to note that you will do two assignments related to the final project during the course of the semester. The first assignment will be a final project proposal where you will turn in a 1-page document/written proposal that outlines the area that you would like to focus on for the final project. The second assignment is a preliminary rough draft of your paper (i.e., an annotated bibliography of at least 5 articles that you intend to include in your final project). Both of these preliminary assignments are graded. Please see the due dates for both of these assignments in the weekly calendar below.

In addition to the written version of your final project, you will present your final project to the rest of the class during the last class meeting of the semester. More information about the written version of your final project and the accompanying oral presentation will be provided to you during the semester.

*Participation. This class is designed to provide a lively and supportive forum for the ongoing discussion of and learning about a number of issues related to second language acquisition theory and its relation to L2 teaching practice. Your participation in the activities of the class is a key component of its usefulness. “Participation” in this class includes your regular, active contributions to the discussions about the readings, your involvement in/attentive listening of any oral report/presentation given by your classmates, and regular attendance.

*Attendance. Please note that given the number of students enrolled in this course, attendance is crucial and will affect the nature of our class discussions. Specifically, when you are gone from class, the rest of the class suffers. Therefore, please try to make it to every class meeting. If you, for any reason, will not be in class, please email me beforehand to let me know. Note that you will be allowed to miss one class session during the course of the semester without penalty (regardless of the nature of the absence). Beginning with the second absence, you must provide me with written documentation (in the next class after the class that you miss) regarding why you missed
class. If the absence is deemed excusable, you will not be penalized. If the absence is deemed inexcusable, your overall grade for the course will be lowered by 3 percentage points (3%).

**Grading**

- Written proposal for final project (5 pts.): 5%
- Class preparation/active participation, and attendance (2 @ 15 pts.): 10%
- Oral presentation of final written project (20 pts.): 10%
- First draft of final written project—annotated bibliography (20 pts.): 15%
- Mid-semester exam (25 pts.): 15%
- Leading a critical discussion of an assigned reading (20 pts.): 15%
- Written version of the final project (50 pts.): 30%

Final letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93% and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>87 – 89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 – 82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77 – 79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>73 – 76.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>70 – 72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>67 – 69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>63 – 66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60 – 62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.9% or below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that I do not award extra credit in my courses. Requesting extra credit at the end of the semester when you realize that your grade is not where you want it to be will only result in a frustrating experience for you and me. Be responsible for your learning and start earning your grade from the beginning of the semester.

**Academic Honesty/Integrity**

It is your responsibility to know the definitions and consequences of plagiarism; please read the Academic Honesty/Integrity section of the USU General Catalog:

[http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=3140&hl=academic+honesty&returnto=search](http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=3140&hl=academic+honesty&returnto=search)

**Canvas**

This course will use a Canvas webpage. Therefore, please be sure that you are checking your USU account or forwarding your USU e-mail to an account you check regularly as announcements/updates about the course will primarily be made via Canvas. In addition, access to all of the articles/readings will be made available to you via Canvas. This course’s Canvas page can be found via the following website: [https://usu.instructure.com/](https://usu.instructure.com/)

**Other**

If you have any complaints about this course, I ask you first to bring to me directly any concerns you may have about instruction in this course. Should we not be able to resolve your
concerns to your satisfaction, you would then speak to Dr. Brad Hall, Chair of the Department of Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies (204 A Old Main).

Please let me know during the first week of class (after class or during my office hours) if you have a disability for which special arrangements may be needed, such as modification in seating.

One final note regarding your written work in this course: As is customary in the fields of applied linguistics and SLA, formal written work should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) citation style. All in-text citations and works listed in the works cited page of your final project need to follow APA guidelines. For more information about the APA citation style, please consult the following:


You may also want to consult a useful online guide to citing/writing via APA guidelines (created and maintained by Purdue University): [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/) (or simply Google “owl” and “purdue”).