

WEBSTER UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Second Language Acquisition (COMM 5230.01)  
Instructor: Bert Barry, Ph.D.  
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#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Participants will explore theories and models of second language acquisition (SLA). They will learn about the emotional, social, and intellectual implications of the process of learning a second language while maintaining the first. Students will analyze and compare first and second language acquisition and apply strategies related to second language learning in a cross-cultural setting.

Course activities will include the following:

Read about and discuss the principles of socio-linguistics and psycho-linguistics associated with learning a second language;

Apply those principles as you analyze case studies of second language learners;

Work in teams to formulate principles of SLA from a synthesis of the readings and observational data;

Review current reports and analyses of SLA.

For the final project you may do one of the following:

Present data from observations of a particular learner and present evidence that supports or refutes current theories of second language learning;

OR

Present a portfolio that documents that you have mastered the content for your state's standards for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers.

This course is appropriate for foreign language teachers, teachers of immigrant children, or those who wish to teach English as a foreign or second language, abroad or in an English-speaking country.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course you will be able to:

Illustrate the major processes and strategies that second language learners use;

Describe the factors that affect second language learning (SLL) and second language acquisition (SLA).

Specifically, you will be able to:

- Explain the affective, cognitive, and social factors that influence SLA;
- Describe the effects of individual factors such as age, personality, and motivation on SLA;
- Identify the characteristics of optimal input for SLA;
- Recognize the silent period and inter-language used in SLA;
- Analyze one learner's SLA in terms of findings from recent research.

This course will prepare you to demonstrate the second-language acquisition competencies required for Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) certification in many states.

Core Competencies:

Second Language Acquisition

- The development of theories and models of second language acquisition
- The emotional, social, and intellectual implications of the process of learning a second language while maintaining the first language
- The analysis and comparison of first language and second language acquisition
- Learning styles and strategies as they relate to the second language learner in a cross-cultural setting

Extension Competencies:

Linguistics

- The functions of language in social and academic settings
- Language and Culture
- The impact of culture on perception, communication, behavior, and learning
- The role of world politics, economics, history, and geography in shaping belief systems
- The dynamics of cross-cultural interactions
- Language Competency
- Native or near-native proficiency in standard English (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

## RESOURCES

Course Text: Brown, H.D. Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000.

Library and on-line sources to analyze and explain your subject's language acquisition strategies.

## EVALUATION

You must take an active role in your education in this class. You will participate in readings and team projects that will help prepare you for the final project. These assignments include analyzing case studies and presenting evidence of a learner's use of the strategies described in the assigned readings.

### Final Project

You may choose one of the following:

#### **Term Paper**

Provide evidence of SLA in one subject. Video or audio tape the subject in formal and informal settings, interview the subject about his/her strategies, interview the subject's teachers, family members, or others with information about the subject's learning style, avoidance strategies, and other approaches to SLA. Analyze these data for evidence that the subject does/does not use processes and strategies described in the SLA literature. Research the subject's native language and culture for evidence of barriers and facilitations to SLL.

#### **Portfolio**

Provide evidence that you have mastered the core competencies described above. You may include students' work, research papers, annotated bibliographies, or other evidence that you might present to your state Department of Education to document that you should be certified in TESL.

## CONCLUSIONS

Language and the ways it is used are fascinating topics. Since human culture is an impossibility without language, language acquisition is one of the most fundamental of all human activities. The goal of this course is not only to acquaint you with the basic theories of Second Language Acquisition, but also to heighten your awareness of the vital importance of language itself.

## SCHEDULE

All class meetings will take place in Webster Hall, room 325. If you must miss a class session, please call or e-mail in advance.

1/24 Introductions  
1/31 Current Issues in Second Language Acquisition  
2/7 First Language Acquisition  
2/14 Age and Acquisition  
2/21 Team Reports on Age in SLA  
2/28 Learning Theories  
3/7 Learning Styles and Strategies  
3/21 Personality Factors  
3/28 Team Reports on Individual Differences  
4/4 Socio-Cultural Factors  
4/11 Cross-Linguistic Influences  
4/18 Team Reports on Social Influences  
4/25 Communicative Competence  
5/2 Theories of Second Language Acquisition  
5/9 Team Reports on Best Explanation(s) of SLA  
Final Projects/Portfolios due

Starting on January 31, each student from Group A, B, or C will make a 10 – 15 minute presentation on current developments in the field of Second Language Acquisition. On-line, print, or other information sources are all welcome.

*This syllabus is subject to change, as needed.*