

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: SPEAKING
Illinois Wesleyan University ~ Spanish 410
Spring 2006

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Required Materials

- Ellis, R. (1997), *Second Language Acquisition*.
- Journal articles on e-reserve will supplement the texts.
- A bilingual dictionary (Suggested)

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) with an emphasis on speaking. It has been designed for advanced undergraduate Foreign Language and advanced Spanish majors and minors. The course format will include readings, discussions in Spanish, and student presentations. It will examine speaking in a second language from several perspectives: theory, evaluation/testing, pedagogy, and materials.

Components of the Course

At the beginning of the semester, the emphasis will be on reading and group discussion in Spanish. We will start with an overview of the major topics of the course to help you decide on an area for your research projects. After this introductory period, a typical week will include reading, discussion, written analyses of the readings, and ongoing work on the research project. Each of these components of the course is discussed in more detail below. A highlight of the course will be to present your research in English at the John Wesley Powell Conference on Saturday, April 8th 2006.

• **Readings.** Readings will be from the two texts and from articles and book chapters on e-reserve. Try to focus your attention while reading on these two areas: 1) What are the main points in this section/chapter? What information am I learning here? And 2) by what method(s) is the author coming up with the information? In the case of the textbooks, the authors have chosen topics to address, and discuss these topics by raising questions, synthesizing research by other people to respond to the questions, and then summarizing what is known and what is still under investigation or a subject of debate in the SLA field. In the case of research reports, the researchers usually follow a standard format of introducing a problem, surveying what is already known about it, explaining how they set up their study, and then reporting and interpreting results. You will use this same format in your research paper, so be aware from the beginning of how the writers make their research reports convincing.

• **Leading of Class Discussion.** Each student will (in Spanish) lead a group class discussion once in the semester on course readings (on e-reserve in Ames). You will facilitate discussion of the chapter/article by handing out a sheet describing an activity or offering questions to your classmates the class-time before the reading assignment is due to stimulate discussion on the next class meeting. (If you present on a Friday, have your handout ready on Monday). You should think about important themes for discussion and application of the article/chapter to the general issue of the course. You should give a brief introduction (5-10 minutes) on the readings bringing in outside materials where appropriate and important ideas to be discussed.

Evaluation of class discussion:

Quality of introduction	20%
Quality of handout or activity used to stimulate discussion	20%
Critical interpretation of material	25%
Active engagement of classmates in discussion of ideas, strengths, weaknesses, conclusions, application of material to Second Language Acquisition	25%
Effectiveness of manner of presentation and facilitation	10%

• **Class Participation**. Active participation in class discussions is an essential learning component of this class. Careful reading and synthesis of the assigned materials is reflected in your contributions. I will be looking for quality and quantity of participation (i.e., talking about the reading, asking questions, responding to presentations of others).

• **Reaction Papers**. During the course of the semester you will also write in Spanish 3 one-page reaction papers to some of the articles you will read (not to the textbook chapters). You may not write a reaction paper to an article that you have presented. These response pieces will follow a specific format: one-paragraph abstract (summary) of the article and a two-paragraph discussion (reaction). You should try to fit your reaction on one page (single-spaced). The purpose of these one-pagers is to give you practice in identifying and stating succinctly the research questions, results, and implications of research studies, and also to help you make connections between and among your readings. In the two-thirds of your paper that is devoted to reaction you should discuss such things as the research question, whether other investigators have looked at similar questions, what the investigator may have left out of the study that should have been included, etc. In other words, base your reaction on the other readings and on your informed opinion, not on "gut instinct" or your personal experience with learning other languages.

Due dates: Reaction #1: Jan. 27. Reaction #2: Feb. 17. Reaction #3: April 3.

• **Research Project**. The purpose of the research project is to give you a hands-on introduction to SLA research. This is not the kind of paper that you can knock off in a couple of weeks of intense efforts at the end of the semester; you will need to invest consistent time and effort in it over the course of the whole semester. To facilitate this process, I will have you turn in drafts on a fairly regular basis. With each draft, I will expect to see greater quantity and increased focus. Your project will have several parts: statement of the research problem, discussion and analysis of previous literature on the topic, data collection, and data analysis and discussion. SLA research takes time, particularly if you decide to do a longitudinal study (examinations of performance on the same subjects at different points in time), or if you have data that are time-consuming to transcribe.

Due dates: Informal presentation: Feb. 10. Proposal: Feb. 24. First draft: March 17. Conference: April 8. Final draft: April 25.

I will help each of you find a research project that fits your interests and knowledge level, and will coach you closely throughout the semester. Here is a list of the types of projects that you might undertake (note that key phrases are underlined):

- A replication study, in which you re-do a published study, but add touches of your own, like working with a different language, different level of learners, or incorporate an additional test.
- A study of classroom discourse, such as the kinds of negotiations of meaning students engage in when doing pair or small-group activities.
- A cross-sectional study, in which you examine the kinds of communication strategies (what learners do to get meaning across when they don't have the needed vocabulary) students at different levels of proficiency use when engaged in a speaking task.
- An order of acquisition study in which you examine speech samples of learners at various levels for the appearance of particular syntactic features.

As mentioned above, we will participate in the JWP Conference on April 8th. Most professional conferences have both oral presentations and poster sessions. In a poster sessions, the presenters summarize their research project on a large poster, which is mounted on an easel. People walk around, look at the posters, and stop to talk to the researchers about their projects. In an oral session, the presenters have 20 minutes to orally summarize their research project to an audience of students and professors using visuals such as handouts and power point. (I will decide who will present in a poster or oral format.)

The research paper will serve as the final exam for the course; we will meet on Tuesday April 25 from 3:30 to 5:30 to celebrate you turning it in.

Grading System

The final grade will be based on student performance in the following:

Leading of class discussion (1)	15%
Class participation	30%
Reaction papers (3)	15%
Research project (present at a session at the JWP Conference and finished product)	40%

Additional Information

I will make myself available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Before course accommodations will be made, students may be required to provide documentation to the Associate Provost, 211 Holmes Hall, 556-3107.

Course Calendar – First 3 weeks. Check on-line calendar for full semester

9 enero

Introduction to the course

13 enero

- Read SLA: Ch. 1-2
- Important note about reading assignments:
 - * Whenever you have a reading assignment in SLA, in addition to reading the chapter(s), you should also read the excerpts in Section 2 of the book (pp. 91ff.)
- We will begin to analyze how SLA articles are structured.

16 enero

- Read the following articles (on e-reserve):
 - * Brooks, F. B. (1992). Spanish III learners talking to one another through a jigsaw task.
 - * Ellis, R. (1992). Learning to communicate in the classroom: A study of two language learners' requests.
 - * Ioup, E., et al. (1994). Reexamining the critical period hypothesis: A case study of successful adult SLA in a naturalistic environment.
- We will continue to analyze how SLA articles are structured.

20 enero

- Read SLA: Ch. 3-4
- We will continue to analyze how SLA articles are structured.

23 enero

- Read the following articles (on e-reserve):
 - *Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors.
 - *Gass, S., & Varonis, E. M. (1994). Input, interaction, and second language production.
 - *Tarone, E. (1985). Variability in interlanguage use: A study of style-shifting in morphology and syntax.

27 enero

- Read SLA: Ch. 5-6
- Reaction Paper 1 due.