

## Theoretical Foundations of Second Language Acquisition

Ochanomizu University, Tokyo

August 2015

Instructor: Prof. Silvina Montrul  
Email: montrul@illinois.edu

### Course Overview

This course is a general introduction to theoretical perspectives on second language acquisition (SLA). SLA is a diverse, vibrant field within linguistics, applied linguistics, and cognitive science. Our goal here will be to gain a deeper understanding of the primary theoretical tenets, fundamental research questions, and research methodologies in the broad field of SLA. This course will focus primarily on theoretical aspects of SLA, and draw insights from linguistic theory and applied linguistics. Questions we will address include: What is second language acquisition? How do adults and children learn a second language? What factors contribute to variability in second language learning? Can a second language learner sound like a native speaker? Why are some learners better at learning a language than others? Does the context where the language is spoken matter? Can teachers alter the route of language acquisition by correcting learners? Do more motivated students learn a second language faster and better than less motivated students? Do some people have a talent for languages? Does attitude matter?

### Course Objectives

To develop expert understanding of second language acquisition by:

- Becoming familiar with critical questions, theories, methods, and findings in the literature
- Critically evaluating research findings and their implications

### Class Format

This class will be a mixture of lecture/discussion. At times the professor will provide a lecture to introduce background concepts from the readings and supplementary information from outside of the readings. Students are encouraged to ask questions, engage in discussion, and actively participate during the lectures. PowerPoint slides from lectures will be available *after* we have covered the material. Students should be prepared to take their own notes during class.

### Evaluation

Attendance, class participation, and completion of a short quiz.

### Topics

Lecture 1: Introduction

Lecture 2: Interlanguage (Montrul 2014)

Lecture 3: The Fundamental Differences Hypothesis (Kweon & Bley-Vroman 2011)

Lecture 4: The Critical Period Hypothesis

Lecture 5: Age Effects and ultimate attainment (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2009)

Lecture 6: L1 transfer

Lecture 7: Transitivity alternations in Spanish, English and Turkish (Montrul 2000)

Lecture 8: Aspectual interpretations in Japanese (Gabriele 2010)

Lecture 9: Scope in English (Schulz 2011)  
 Lecture 10: Gender in Spanish (Grüter et al. 2012)  
 Lecture 11: The linguistic environment (Shintani & Ellis 2010)  
 Lecture 12: Individual Differences: Cognition and working memory  
 Lecture 13: Individual Differences: Aptitude  
 Lecture 14: Individual Differences: Motivation  
 Lecture 15: Summary and quiz

### **Recommended Background Reading (Optional)**

Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. London: Hodder Education and Hachette UK. (This is the first edition of the book – there is now a second edition available. Make sure you get the first edition.)

### **Required Articles** (downloadable them from the library or I can make available)

Abrahamsson, N., & Hyltenstam, K. (2009). Age of onset and nativelikeness in a second language: Listener perception versus linguistic scrutiny. *Language Learning*, 59(2), 249–306.

Gabriele, A. 2010. Deriving meaning through context: Interpreting bare nominal in Second Language Japanese, *Second Language Research* 26, 379-405.

Grüter, T., Lew-Williams, C. & Fernald, A. 2012. Grammatical gender in L2: A production or a real time processing problem? *Second Language Research* 28, 191-215.

Keon, S. O. & Bley-Vroman, R. 2011. Acquisition of the constraints on wanna contraction by advanced second language learners: Universal Grammar and imperfect knowledge. *Second Language Research*, 207-228

Montrul, S. 2014. Transfer, fossilization and incomplete acquisition: The Interlanguage Hypothesis 40 years later. In E. Tarone and Z-H Han (eds.). *Interlanguage: 40 Years later. In honor of Larry Selinker*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Montrul, S. 2000. Transitivity alternations in second language acquisition: Toward a modular view of transfer. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 22, 2, 229-274.

Schulz, B. 2011. Syntactic creativity in second language English: wh-scope in Japanese-English Interlanguage. *Second Language Research* 27, 313-341.

Shintani, N. & Ellis, R. 2010. The incidental acquisition of English plural –s by Japanese children in comprehension-based and production-based lessons. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 32, 607-637.