LING-455 Second Language Syntax

Professor Lydia White Fall 2016
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or by appointment

PLACE AND TIME: 1085 Dr. Penfield, #202
Wednesdays and Fridays 1.05 – 2.25pm

PREREQUISITE: LING 371 Syntax 1 or LING 301 Structure of English or permission

READINGS
REQUIRED TEXT:
ADDITIONAL READINGS - articles available in myCourses.

CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES
This course looks at what L2 learners acquire, with a particular focus on L2 morphology and syntax, the kinds of structure L2 learners internalize, the content of the interlanguage grammar, the course of acquisition over time, and resulting changes in structure. It also considers theories as to how the learner acquires the L2, with a particular focus on the roles of Universal Grammar and the mother tongue. The objective is for students to understand some of the main debates in the field of generative second language acquisition research, how to assess experimental results and also how to conduct research in this area.

EVALUATION
Two assignments; one project; mid-term exam; final exam. All of these are required. Students who miss an exam or an assignment/project deadline must produce a doctor's certificate or other relevant documentation; otherwise, late submissions of work will be subject to a penalty. Work submitted more than one week after the due date (without authorization) will not be accepted. Exams, assignments and projects may be written in English or French.
Note: Anyone getting a D or F will NOT be given the option of doing extra work.

DATES AND DEADLINES
Assignment 1 - data analysis (7%) Due not later than Wed. Oct 5<sup>th</sup> (in class)
Midterm test (25%) Wed. Oct 19<sup>th</sup> 2016 (in class)
Assignment 2 - task development (8%) Due not later than Wed Nov 9<sup>th</sup> (in class)
Project (25%) Due not later than 4pm on Monday Dec 5<sup>th</sup>
Final exam (35%) TBA
(n.b. No class on Friday Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>.)
COURSE OUTLINE

(n.b. The week numbers are estimations only. Slides used in class will be posted in myCourses.)

1. Introduction: Some background assumptions (Week 1)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 1
   The nature of grammars; the acquisition problem; research methodologies

2. Types of acquisition (Week 2)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 5, Ch. 6
   L1, Bilingual, Child L2, Adult L2, Heritage, Attrition

3. Critical Period Hypothesis (Week 2)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 4
   (Recommended reading: Johnson & Newport 1989)

4. Inflectional morphology and function words (Weeks 3, 4)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 7; see also Ch. 5.3
   (Recommended reading: Lardiere 1998)
   Inflectional morphology and function words
   Inflectional features (tense, agreement, etc)
   Theories about the acquisition of inflection

5. Principles and parameters of Universal Grammar (Weeks 5, 6, 7)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 2, Ch. 8
   Theories about the roles of UG and the L1
   Prodrop
   Word order
   Verb movement
   Wh-movement
   Binding

7. Lexicon and argument structure (Weeks 8, 9)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 9
   (Recommended readings: Hirakawa 2001; Inagaki 2001)
   Bilingual lexicon
   Declarative and procedural memory
   Argument structure
     Motion verbs
     Unaccusatives
8. Interfaces in L2 (Weeks 10, 11)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 10, Ch. 11
   (Recommended readings: Ionin et al. 2004; Sorace & Filiaci 2006; White et al. 2012)
   Syntax-semantics
      Definiteness and specificity
   Syntax-discourse
      Topic and focus
      Pronoun reference

9. Processing and parsing (Week 12)
   Reading: Slabakova Ch. 3, Ch. 12
   (Recommended reading: Juffs 1998)

10. Bottleneck Hypothesis and language teaching (Week 13)
    Reading: Slabakova Ch. 13

11. Summary and review (last class)
RECOMMENDED READINGS  (available on MyCourses)


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McGill University values academic integrity. All students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. For more information, see: www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/.

Article 16(a) of the Code, which is devoted to plagiarism, reads as follows: *No student shall represent another person’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own in any academic writing, such as an essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or a program of study, or represent as his or her own the work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted.*
Note: a hard copy of each assignment and the final project must be provided.

Assignment 1 (7%)  
Due not later than Wed. Oct 5th (in class)  
You will be given data from one or more L2 learners to analyse. You will be provided with the data and questions to guide your analysis approximately 10 days before the assignment is due (in class and in myCourses).

Assignment 2 (8%)  
Due not later than Wed Nov 9th (in class)  
Design a task testing for an L2 learner’s unconscious knowledge of some linguistic property (morphology or syntax) that we have discussed in the course. You are expected to use this task (modified if necessary) in your final project.

More details for the requirements of this assignment will be provided in class and in myCourses, including some suggestions for suitable topics.

Project (25%)  
Deadline: Due not later than 4pm on Monday Dec 5th 2016 in the Linguistics Dept.

Aim. To conduct and write up a pilot experiment on second language acquisition.

Topic. Investigate the L2 acquisition of a morphological or syntactic property that has been covered in the course, in any language of your choice.

Subjects. One L2 learner of the language you are investigating; one native speaker control. (More subjects are possible but not required.)

Task: Use (a revised version of) the task you developed for Assignment 2.

Permission: You will need to get signed permission slips from your subjects. We will discuss this in class.

Format for Project Report:  
(n.b. Do NOT use plastic binders/covers, etc.)

Length: 7 - 10 pages (plus references and appendix), size 12 font, double-spaced.

Number the pages.

Don't forget to attach the signed permission slips.
Cover page. Pick a title that gives the reader an idea of what the paper is about. Give your name and student number.

Please be sure to use the underlined section headings.

Introduction. Briefly outline general issues relevant to your topic and explain what you will be investigating.

Linguistic background. Describe the linguistic property you are investigating. If your project involves claims about transfer, be sure to describe how this property works in the L1 as well as the L2. Include examples.

Acquisition background. Describe the L2 acquisition issue(s) that you are investigating, and relevant L2 acquisition theories. Why is this property of interest/relevance from an acquisition point of view? What is already known about the acquisition of this property/related properties (i.e. what have previous studies found)? What is your hypothesis regarding acquisition of this property?

Method. Describe your subject(s), giving age, sex, mother tongue, estimated proficiency level. Do not use the real names of your subjects in the report; if necessary, use pseudonyms. Describe and explain your test(s). Give examples of test items in the paper; include the full test in an appendix.

Results. Summarize your findings. Present your results in tables, if possible. Generalize rather than giving detailed analyses. Compare the performance of the L2 learner and the native speaker. Statistical analyses of the data are not required. Detailed results should be included in an appendix.

Discussion. Conclusions to be drawn from your results. Brief comparison with other relevant findings in the literature.

References. All papers that you refer to must be referenced. When you cite a reference, use only the name and date (e.g. White 1985). For secondary sources (i.e. you didn’t read them) cite as follows: White 1985, as cited in Slabakova 2016. Give the complete references in the reference section at the end of your paper and NOT in footnotes. (Note that you are expected to show evidence of having read at least one relevant article; in other words, do not rely solely on the textbook and class notes.)

Appendix.