

**LING-455 Second Language Syntax**

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or by appointment

Winter 2018  
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**PLACE AND TIME:**

688 Sherbrooke, Rm 495  
Mondays and Wednesdays 1.05 – 2.25pm

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

**READINGS****REQUIRED TEXT:**

Slabakova, R. 2016. *Second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

**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 objectives are for students to understand some of the main debates in the field of generative second language acquisition, how to assess experimental results and 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 5 days 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 (12%)	Due not later than Mon Feb 12 <sup>th</sup> (in class)
Midterm test (25%)	Wed Feb 21 <sup>st</sup> (in class)
Assignment 2 - task development (8%)	Due not later than Wed Mar 21 <sup>st</sup> (in class)
Project (25%)	Due not later than 4pm on Monday April 16 <sup>th</sup> .
Final exam (30%)	TBA

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

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

### **1. Introduction (Week 1)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 1; Ch. 4 (sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3); Ch. 6 (sections 6.1, 6.2).

Ex. 1.3, 4.2

The nature of grammars; the acquisition problem; research methodologies; effects of age.

### **2. Inflectional morphology and function words (Weeks 2, 3)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 7; see also Ch. 5.3

(Recommended reading: Lardiere 1998)

Ex. 6.4, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

Inflectional morphology and function words; theories about the acquisition of inflection.

### **3. L2 syntax and Universal Grammar (Weeks 4, 5, 6)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 2 (sections 2.1, 2.2), Ch. 8

Ex. 2.5, 8.1, 8.2.

(Recommended readings: Grüter 2005/6; White 1991; White & Juffs 1998)

Theories about the roles of UG and the L1, initially and subsequently; acquisition of principles and parameters (prodrop; word order; verb movement; wh-movement; binding).

### **4. Acquiring a third language (L3) (Week 7)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 6 (section 6.3)

(Recommended reading: Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro 2010)

Ex. 6.5

Theories about the roles of L1 and L2 in L3 acquisition.

### **5. Lexicon and argument structure (Week 8)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 9 (sections 9.3, 9.4)

Ex. 9.4, 9.5

(Recommended readings: Hirakawa 2006; Ullman 2001)

Declarative and procedural memory; argument structure (motion verbs; unaccusatives)

### **6. Interfaces in L2 (Weeks 9, 10)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 10, Ch. 11

(Recommended readings: Ionin et al. 2004; Sorace & Filiaci 2006)

Syntax-semantics interface (definiteness and specificity);

Syntax-discourse interface (topic and focus; pronoun reference)

### **7. Processing and parsing (Week 11, 12)**

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 3 (sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6); Ch. 12

Ex 3.5, 3.6

(Recommended reading: Omaki & Schultz 2011)

Processing and representation; parsing of syntactic structure

## 8. Back to morphology: Bottleneck Hypothesis and Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (Week 13)

Reading: Slabakova Ch. 13, Ch. 7 (section 7.6).

(Recommended reading: Lardiere 2008)

Ex. 4.4, 13.1.

Can L2 problems be reduced to morphology?

## 9. Summary and review (last class)

### RECOMMENDED READINGS (available on MyCourses)

Grüter, T. (2005/2006). Another take on the L2 initial state: evidence from comprehension in L2 German. *Language Acquisition* 13: 287-317.

Hirakawa, M. (2006). More evidence on the knowledge of unaccusativity in L2 Japanese. In S. Unsworth et al. (eds.), *Paths of development in L1 and L2 acquisition*. John Benjamins.

Ionin, T., H. Ko & K. Wexler. (2004). Article semantics in L2 acquisition: the role of specificity. *Language Acquisition* 12: 3-69.

Lardiere, D. (1998). Case and tense in the 'fossilized' steady state. *Second Language Research* 14: 1-26.

Lardiere, D. (2008). Feature assembly in second language acquisition. In J. Liceras, H. Zobl & H. Goodluck (eds.), *The role of formal features in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Omaki, A. & B. Schultz. (2011). Filler-gap dependencies and island constraints in second-language sentence processing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 33: 563-588.

Rothman, J. & J. Cabrelli Amaro. (2010). What variables condition syntactic transfer? A look at the L3 initial state. *Second Language Research* 26: 189-218.

Sorace, A. & F. Filiaci. (2006). Anaphora resolution in near-native speakers of Italian. *Second Language Research* 22: 339-368.

Ullman, M. (2001). The neural basis of lexicon and grammar in first and second language: the declarative/procedural model. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 4: 105-122.

White, L. (1991). Adverb placement in second language acquisition: some effects of positive and negative evidence in the classroom. *Second Language Research* 7: 133-161.

White, L. & A. Juffs. (1998). Constraints on wh-movement in two different contexts of non-native language acquisition: competence and processing. In S. Flynn, G. Martohardjono & W. O'Neil (eds.), *The generative study of second language acquisition* (pp. 111-129). Lawrence Erlbaum.

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### **Assignment 1 (12%)**

Due not later than Mon Feb 12<sup>th</sup> (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 Mar 21<sup>st</sup> (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 April 16<sup>th</sup> 2018 in class or in the Linguistics Dept.

**Aim.** To conduct and write up a pilot experiment on L2 (or L3) acquisition.

**Topic.** Investigate the L2 (or L3) acquisition of a morphological or syntactic property that has been covered in the course, on any L2 (or L3) of your choice.

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

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

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

Note: Suggestions as to possible topics and details on how to write up your report will be provided in class and in myCourses.