

Individual Differences and Variation in Second Language Acquisition

Sample syllabus designed by Amy Hutchinson

Course Description

Second language acquisition is not a “one-size fits all” process. It is affected by a variety of psychological and sociolinguistic factors that differ by individual language learner. In order to better understand second language acquisition and work towards making the learning experience more equitable, we must develop our ability to recognize and understand the variables that can contribute it. In this course, we will discuss a range of individual differences, including factors like gender, identity, age, attitude, and learning disability, highlighting the role that these variables play in second language learning.

Learning Goals

- To develop an understanding of the relationship between second language acquisition and the individual factors that can affect it.
- To learn how to critically examine current literature and outline issues that affect the field, including identifying gaps in pre-existing literature.
- To develop original and motivated research ideas in the area of individual differences and design research that can successfully address potential ideas.
- To demonstrate the ability to communicate about these topics effectively orally and in writing.

Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to understand, critically analyze, and carry-out theoretical research on individual differences in second language acquisition

Required Text

There are no required textbooks in this course. All materials will be sent to you and/or are available through the university library.

Course Requirements

Article presentation

Twice during the semester, each student will present and lead discussion on one of research articles listed. Articles will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, though students may switch articles if

appropriate. Article presentations should consist of a short overview of the main points of the article (literature, methods, results, etc.), but article reconstruction should be kept as brief as possible. The majority of the presentation should focus on critically analyzing the article and facilitating fruitful discussion among students in the course.

Classroom discussion/participation

As seminar that relies heavily on course discussion, I expect every student to keep up with the assigned readings and engage with the research in question. Please plan to regularly and thoughtfully contribute to classroom discussion and to be considerate of others in the course. Substandard participation, including infrequent or irrelevant class discussion, frequent class absence/tardiness, and disrespect to the instructor or your peers, will result in a reduction to this grade.

Final project proposal

Midway through the semester you are asked to submit a final project proposal, where you present your plans for your future research. This proposal must contain a basic explanation outlining the project in question, including relevant literature, methodology/design, and expected results and implications. The final project proposal need not be longer than a page (single-spaced) and project ideas will be workshopped in class shortly after they are due. In addition to our workshop day, you are welcome to meet with me to discuss your projects at any time.

Research project and final paper

Your final project in this course will consist of a research paper that is centered on topics covered in the course. Your paper should be no more than 7000 words and must involve some form of data collection (quantitative or qualitative) and analysis of that data. This project should be innovative and original, motivated by previous literature on second language acquisition and individual differences. While projects outside of the realm of the class are acceptable, they must be first be approved by the instructor. Additional information on the final project will be provided during the semester.

Grading

30%- Article presentations (15% per presentation)

20%- Classroom discussion/participation

10%- Final project proposal

40%- Research project and final paper

Course Outline

WEEK	TOPIC(s)	READING(s)
Week 1	Course overview/Introduction to Individual differences in SLA	Dörnyei & Skehan (2003)*; Ellis, (2004)*
Week 2	Age	DeKeyser (2013)*; Birdsong, (2007); DeKeyser (2000); Flege et al. (1999)
Week 3	Gender	van der Slik et al. (2015); Catalán (2003); Major (2004); Baker & MacIntyre (2000)
Week 4	Personality	Dewaele (2012)*; MacIntyre & Charos (1996); Obralic & Mulalic (2017); Verhoeven & Vermeer, (2002)
Week 5	Anxiety	MacIntyre et al. (1997); MacIntyre & Gardner (1994); Lu & Liu (2011); Horwitz (2001)
Week 6	Willingness to communicate	MacIntyre et al. (2001); Dörnyei & Kormos (2000); Lee & Lee (2020); Yashima et al. (2004)
Week 7	Motivation	Gardner et al. (1985); Csizér & Dörnyei (2005); Saito et al., (2017); Macintyre et al. (2017)
Week 8	Attitude and Identity	Rindal (2010); Clément & Kruidenier (1983); Gardner et al. (1999); Lamb (2004)
Week 9	Attitude and Identity	Trofimovich et al. (2019); Moyer (2007) Final project proposals due. In-class workshop.

Week 10	First language influence	Ortega (2014)*; Schepens et al. (2013); Van Hell & Tanner (2012); Otwinowska & Szewczyk (2019); Collins (2004)
Week 11	Multilingualism	Odlin & Jarvis (2004); Llama & Cardoso (2018); Schepens et al. (2016); Falk & Bardel (2011)
Week 12	Intelligence & working memory	Genesee (1976); Ellis (1996); Mackey et al. (2010); Robinson, (2002)
Week 13	Language aptitude	Robinson (2019)*, Skehan, (2002)*; Sparks et al. (2009); Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2008)
Week 14	Learning styles and strategies	Chamot (2005)*; Carson & Longhini (2002); Tight (2010); Gu & Johnson (1996)
Week 15	Learning disabilities	Yu (2013); Petersen et al. (2012); Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2005); Kuzmina et al. (2019)
Week 16	Student choice -During this week, students may choose to revisit a previously discussed topic or discuss a new topic.	TBD

*Articles marked with an asterisk indicate review articles that will be presented by the instructor

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