

**Language Learning and Second Language Acquisition (7.5 HECs)**

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**Teacher:** Špela MežekEmail: [spela.mezek@english.su.se](mailto:spela.mezek@english.su.se)**Course description**

This course provides an introduction to theories and research in second language acquisition and language learning in general. Key topics that are discussed are:

- Age and critical periods in the acquisition of human language;
- Cross-linguistic influences and transfer;
- The linguistic environment and the social dimensions of L2 learning;
- The cognitive dimensions of L2 learning;
- The development of interlanguages: emergent and dynamic systems;
- Motivation and individual differences in language learning.

The course requires active participation. Students are expected to prepare discussion questions and find research materials based on their topics of interest.

Besides theoretical aspects of language learning, the course also gives students a hands-on introduction to research methods in language learning research. All students are required to present orally and critically discuss theories and research during the course. The final examination includes a research proposal (2,000-2,500 words). Note that the course is very reading intensive, and the schedule is rather tight. Please plan accordingly.

**Intended learning outcomes**

At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the key theories in language learning and SLA;
- Critically review relevant research on language learning/SLA topics of interest;
- Apply their knowledge to design research studies in language learning/SLA.

**Grading**

The course adopts the 7-grade SU scale (A-F).

To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examination assignments [not done all examination assignments=no grade].

To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must complete all the examination assignments and demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level (see Grading criteria below).

**Course activities**

The course consists of the following activities:

- Seminars;
- Reading and preparatory tasks;

Before each seminar, students are expected to:

- finish the assigned reading and do any other preparatory tasks;
  - post 3 discussion questions on Athena one day before each seminar. The questions should be based on the assigned readings;
  - for four seminars, find and read a research article of their own choice connected to the topic of the seminar. A suggested list of articles is on Athena, but students can also find another research article to read. (The group who is presenting at the seminar can skip reading the article for that seminar.)
  - The students should be prepared to discuss the reading and tasks at the seminar.
- Student presentations (see Examination and Assignments for details).

## **Examination**

Students are required to complete the following:

1. One oral assignment (Pass/Fail)  
In a group present one of the alternative approaches to SLA (see Atkinson, 2011, 2018).
2. Final written assignment (A-F): A course portfolio, which includes a research proposal.

Details about the assignments are in Assignments.

Both of the above points are required in order to qualify for a grade. If a student does not complete all of the assignments, no course grade will be given. The deadline for the final written assignment is at the end of the course (see p. 4). There is also a retake deadline 5-6 weeks later. Students who do not submit all the required assignments during the course can still submit such assignments on the Department deadlines for late submissions (see Department website).

## **Course format**

The course will take place in seminar form, with minimum or no lecturing. Seminars are intended to be active, hands-on opportunities for students to discuss and practice what they have learned in the readings, and it is therefore important to complete these beforehand.

During each seminar we will summarize and discuss the readings, prompted by the discussion questions uploaded on Athena. The presenters of an alternative approach to SLA will provide an overview of the main tenets of such an approach and prepare questions for whole-class discussion. During the seminars we will also make time to do small data-analysis tasks, work in groups and peer review the progress towards the research proposal.

## **Required readings**

### Textbook:

Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge.

### Selected chapters from:

Atkinson, D. (2011). *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge. [e-book at SU library]

Gass, S., & Mackey, A. (2011). *Data elicitation for second and foreign language research*. New York: Routledge. [e-book at SU library]

Van Patten, B., & Williams, J. (2015). *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction*. New York: Routledge. [e-book at SU library]

Other required readings:

- Atkinson, D., Churchill, E., Nishino, T., & Okada, H. (2018). Language learning great and small: Environmental support structures and learning opportunities in a sociocognitive approach to second language acquisition/teaching. *The Modern Language Journal*, 102(3), 471-493.
- Chaudron, C. (2003). Data collection in SLA research. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 762-828). Oxford: Blackwell.
- The Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 16, 19-47.
- Four research articles of your own choice. A list of suggested articles is on Athena, but you can also find your own. The articles should be from a peer reviewed journal. A list of top tier journals is on Athena.

**Schedule**

<b>Seminar</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Assigned reading</b>	<b>Task before seminar</b>
1.	Introduction to SLA Introduction to SLA methods	Atkinson (introduction) Gass & Mackey (Ch. 1) Ortega (Ch. 1)	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena
2.	SLA theories SLA methods Designing an SLA study	Chaudron (2003) Van Patten & Williams (Ch. 1)	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena
3.	Age and critical periods in the acquisition of human language Cross-linguistic influences and transfer Research proposal: research questions  <u>Group presentation:</u> • The sociocultural approach to SLA (Atkinson, Ch. 1)	Ortega (Chs. 2 & 3) A research article of your own choice	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> Formulate at least 3 research questions and bring them to class
4.	The linguistic environment: input and output The cognitive dimensions of L2 learning Research proposal: rationale  <u>Group presentation:</u> • The sociocognitive approach (Atkinson et al., 2018)	Ortega (Chs. 4 & 5) A research article of your own choice	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> choose an area of investigation and a research question; be ready to discuss them in class
5.	The development of “interlanguages” Research proposal: data collection method  <u>Group presentation:</u> • Complexity theory (Atkinson, Ch. 2)	Ortega (Ch. 6) A research article of your own choice	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> revise your research question and think about the rationale for your study (i.e., how you could frame it in light of existing SLA theories and prior studies; what kind of research gap it would fill)

6.	Individual differences in language learning: aptitude and affect Research proposal: updates on the data collection method  <u>Group presentation:</u> • Language socialization (Atkinson, Ch. 4)	Ortega (Chs. 7 & 9) Gass & Mackey (choose one chapter) A research article of your own choice	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> design a method of data collection that would be suited to answer your research question
7.	Motivation Research proposal: limitations and significance  <u>Group presentation:</u> • Identity (Atkinson, Ch. 3)	Ortega (Ch. 8) A research article of your own choice	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> start drafting the proposal
8.	Social approaches to SLA SLA after the social turn Research proposal: peer review	Atkinson (Ch. 7) The Douglas Fir Group (2016) Ortega (Ch. 10)	Post 3 discussion questions on Athena <u>Work towards the research proposal:</u> write a complete draft of your proposal and upload it to Athena before the seminar

*Please note that there may be occasional changes to seminar dates/times and rooms. Check Time Edit regularly for updates.*

## **Deadlines:**

Course portfolio: 19 January 2025 (resubmission 23 February 2025)

## **Assignments**

### Group presentation:

#### *Alternative approaches to SLA*

In a group you will present one of the alternative approaches to SLA (see Atkinson, 2011, 2018). You should structure the presentation following the standard organization of the chapters in Atkinson's (2011) book: (a) overview; (b) theoretical principles; (c) research methods; (d) supporting findings; (e) differences vis-à-vis other alternative approaches; (f) future directions. You should prepare some discussion questions and/or tasks to engage your audience.

Format: 10 minutes, with slides or a handout. The presentation should be uploaded on Athena. A summary of your presentation has to be included in the course portfolio.

### Course portfolio

Your final grade will be based on your course portfolio, which will demonstrate your achievement of the learning outcomes (see Grading criteria). The course portfolio must include:

- (a) a summary of your presentation of an alternative approach to SLA;
- (b) a list of the four research articles you have read and your critical reflection on them;
- (c) the final version of your research proposal (see below); and
- (d) a guided reflection concerning what you have learned during the course overall and through the process of designing and writing your research proposal.

*Research proposal:* In this course you are expected to propose a manageable research study to show that you have understood how to motivate and design an empirical study within the field of SLA. Your work towards the research proposal should start early on (see the schedule).

Detailed instructions on the portfolio and the proposal will be provided later via the course website on Athena.

### **Course grading criteria**

#### **Portfolio grading criteria**

<p><b>A: Excellent</b></p> <p>The portfolio demonstrates an excellent achievement of the learning outcomes: the student has reached a deep understanding of key theories, concepts, and methodological issues in the field; the student can critically use this knowledge to review existing research on LL/SLA topics, and is able to apply this knowledge to propose an original and well-supported research study in the field.</p>
<p><b>B: Very good</b></p> <p>The portfolio meets the criteria for C plus some for A.</p>
<p><b>C: Good</b></p> <p>The portfolio demonstrates a good achievement of the learning outcomes: the student has developed a rather good understanding of key theories, concepts, and methodological issues in the field; the student can use this knowledge to discuss with some critical insight existing research on LL/SLA topics, and is able to apply this knowledge to propose a good research study.</p>
<p><b>D: Satisfactory</b></p> <p>The portfolio meets the criteria of E plus some for C.</p>
<p><b>E: Adequate</b></p> <p>The portfolio demonstrates minimally adequate achievement of the learning outcomes: the student has developed a basic understanding of key theories, concepts, and methodological issues in the field; the student can draw some connections between this knowledge and existing research on LL/SLA topics, and is able to apply this knowledge to propose a basic research study.</p>
<p><b>Fx: Fail, some additional work required</b></p> <p>The portfolio meets some of the criteria for E and is close to being minimally adequate.</p>
<p><b>F: Fail, much more work required</b></p> <p>The student's work does not demonstrate the achievement of the course outcomes at a minimally adequate level.</p>

## Oral presentation grading criteria

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Fail</b>
<b>Content</b>	The presentation introduces the topic of the presentation in a clear and concise manner demonstrating the student's understanding of the linguistic research issues discussed. The contents under discussion are presented and discussed in a lucid manner.	In the presentation the student does not demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the linguistic issues under discussion. The contents under discussion are not presented in an adequate manner.
<b>Organisation and language</b>	The presentation is well structured and easy to follow. The language used is academic and does not contain any severe mistakes.	The organisation of the presentation is poor, and the language used contains several mistakes.