

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Kovács Gábor, PhD.

kovacs.gabor.istvan@uni-nke.hu

Vice-Dean for Research

Associate Professor

Department of Digital Media and Communication

István Nemeskürty Faculty of Teacher Training

Ludovika University of Public Service

Course content and teaching methods

The course provides an overview of the cognitive background of second language acquisition as revealed by psycholinguistic research and theorising. The classes address commonly used experimental paradigms, robust findings, and possible avenues of future research in this area. Broadly speaking, the topics cover the cognitive architecture and the range of mental processes responsible for acquiring L2 knowledge and skills. Specifically, the course focuses on the following issues:

- The role of working memory in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary, grammar, and the development of reading and speaking skills
- The role of declarative and procedural memory systems in SLA: Ullman's neurocognitive DP-model
- Evidence for implicit and statistical learning in SLA and the role of attention in implicit learning processes
- Interaction between implicit and explicit knowledge in SLA: DeKeyser's skill acquisition theory and the strong interface position
- Practice and automatization in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary and grammar: the effects of practice schedule and corrective feedback
- Learning from interaction: Long's cognitive-interactionist theory of instructed SLA (the role of scaffolding, pushing output and negative feedback in conversations)

In the classes, each of the above topics will be discussed in a separate block consisting of an interactive presentation of the core concepts and terminology, demonstrations of classic experiments, and an open debate on the interpretation of the empirical findings. The content of the blocks will loosely follow the structure of the core reading (Chapters 23–28 in Godfroid & Hopp, 2023).

Requirements and assessment

To complete the course, students are required to submit a paper (between 20,000–25,000 characters in length without spaces, excluding the list of references) providing an integrated review of at least five empirical studies related to one of the topics discussed in the course. Some (or even all) of these studies may be selected from the sources cited in one of the chapters in the core reading. The paper must compare and contrast the methodological details, the key findings, and the theoretical implications of the studies reviewed. The assignment must be concluded with a brief description of an idea for a new study that would logically complement the literature by addressing an issue that is not specifically targeted by any of the papers reviewed. This research gap may be inspired by the

“future directions” section at the end of the relevant chapter in the core reading, or it may be a direct extension of the papers reviewed based on a novel variation/combination of the methods applied in those studies.

Student papers will be evaluated for relevance, accuracy, scope/breadth, argumentation, structure/coherence, accessibility/clarity, as well as appropriate/formal writing style. The final mark reflects an overall academic judgement of the paper meeting all these criteria.

Competences

The key competences developed in the course are as follows:

Knowledge

Students gain familiarity with

- contemporary theories of human memory for language,
- classical and recent research on the links between memory systems and SLA,
- the implicit/explicit distinction in the L2 knowledge domain and in the process of language acquisition,
- the role of practice and interaction in both naturalistic and instructed L2 learning.

Skills/abilities

Through class participation and writing the assignment for this course, students develop their skills in

- critical and analytical reasoning,
- integrating information from various sources,
- designing and conducting experiments,
- academic writing.

Attitudes

The detailed discussions of various approaches to data collection and hypothesis testing in psycholinguistic research will help students learn to

- appreciate the effort researchers devote to ensuring the reliability of their measures and the validity of their conclusions,
- understand how theoretical debates characteristically revolve around the usefulness (rather than the correctness) of competing constructs,
- see the value of research producing conclusive results that can be channelled directly into application.

Responsibility/autonomy

By focusing on a specific research domain and reviewing the recent empirical literature, students will gain experience in

- prioritising when selecting the relevant items of literature,
- interpreting and evaluating studies based on their own criteria and preferences,
- noticing gaps in the pattern of findings already covered by previous research,
- originating novel ideas to raise and approach hitherto unanswered research questions.

Compulsory reading

Godfroid, A., & Hopp, H. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and psycholinguistics*. Routledge. Chapters 23–28, pp. 281–360.

Further reading

Baddeley, A. (2017). Modularity, working memory and language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 33(3), 299–311.

Christiansen, M. H. (2019). Implicit statistical learning: A tale of two literatures. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 11(3), 468–481.

DeKeyser, R. (2020). Skill acquisition theory. In B. Van Pattern, G. D. Keating, & S. Wulff (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (3rd ed., pp. 83–104). Routledge.

Ellis, N. C., & Wulff, S. (2019). Cognitive approaches to L2 acquisition. In J. W. Schwieter & A. Benati (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of language learning* (pp. 41–61). Cambridge University Press.

Godfroid, A., & Kim, K. M. (2021). The contributions of implicit-statistical learning aptitude to implicit second language knowledge. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 43(3), 606–634.

Long, M. H. (2020). Optimal input for language learning: Genuine, simplified, elaborated, or modified elaborated? *Language Teaching*, 53(2), 169–182.

Suzuki, Y., Nakata, T., & DeKeyser, R. M. (2019). Optimising second language practice in the classroom: Perspectives from cognitive psychology. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(3), 551–561.

Ullman, M. T. (2020). The declarative/procedural model: A neurobiologically-motivated theory of first and second language. In B. VanPatten G. D. Kearing, & S. Wulff (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition* (3rd ed., pp. 128–161). Routledge.