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California State University—Northridge
Linguistics 417:
Language Acquisition
Syllabus

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Course Description:

This course serves as a general introduction to the study of language acquisition. Principles of first and second language acquisition will be examined in light of such linguistic theory. We will focus on current theoretical notions of language acquisition while paying particular attention to how such notions might become relevant for institutional learning. The development of Pedagogies reflects theoretical considerations. Students through their subject matter (course work & field work) will be made aware of aspects and issues pertaining to variation among people and diversity of California society, including socio-linguistic factors, ethnic backgrounds, and attitudes related to gender.

Course Objectives:

Students enrolled in this course will gain "Explicit" knowledge of language based on linguistic description and analysis so that they may be better equipped to handle general linguistic problems faced by language students in the classroom. Students will demonstrate basic knowledge concerning theories of language *Structure and Communication* through analysis of natural speech. Students will acquire the fundamentals behind different Acquisition Theories & Approaches which espouse either an (i) *Acquisition approach* (=L1) or (ii) *Learning Strategy Approach* (=L2). Students will review some basics of IPA transcription.

Learning Outcomes—Students will:

- Understand in detail what it means to know a human language.
- Understand the questions linguists ask as well as their theoretical findings regarding the nature of language acquisition.
- Collect and analyze language data.

Lecture Topics:

- General Linguistic Theory
- Nature of Language: Universals & Variation.
- Studies in Phonology, Morphology, Syntax & Semantics
- Theories of First and Second Language Acquisition

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- Teaching Methodology—practical application of the theoretical material to general language problems faced in the classroom
- L1 Interferences in L2 learning and psychological factors in L2 language learning
- Error analysis
- Bilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Language Variation & Disorders

Assignments:

- Readings
- In-class Essays (one after each of the three lectures: bluebook) on a relevant lecture topic
- One Paper (3,000w) on an approved topic related in some way to First Language Acquisition
- One Field Work project with Abstract (500w) on Second Language Acquisition (diary/recording) (class presentation).
- Final Exam / Field Work Presentation

Course Requirements:

Attend class meetings; read assigned material; participate in discussions; complete assignments and exams (above). Written work will be marked in terms of clarity, explicitness, and accuracy relevant to course topics. Research for the class will be carried out using current available technologies: viz., computer word processing, data-bank and internet research. (Ethics of internet research, plagiarism and copyright infringement are discussed).

Grading:

- 3 In-class Essays (in conclusion of each lecture) (80% t)
 - Research Paper & Field work Project (20%)
 - E.g., Spontaneous Speech samples of an L2 subject
 - Grammatical analyses (Non-IPA),
 - Phonological analyses (IPA)
 - Sociolinguistic observations
 - Attendance
- 5=A (outstanding), 4=A/B, 3=B/C, 2=C/D, 1=F (fail)

Required Texts:

- (i) Hoff, E. (2004) *Language Development* (3ed) Wadsworth/Thomson Learning Press.
- (ii) Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. *How Languages are Learned* (revised). Oxford University Press.
- (iii) Other Authors: Class handouts

Withdrawal Policy: Withdrawals during the final three weeks of instruction are not permitted except in cases such as accident or serious illness. See the *Schedule of Classes* for withdrawal information prior to the final three weeks.

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Lecture Schedule
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Introduction: *Chapters 1-2* A Brief outline of language philosophy: Nativism (Chomsky) vs. Environmental Conditioning/Behaviourism (Skinner), Linguistic Perspectives, What is language? Tacit-Implicit knowledge vs. Focal-Explicit knowledge, Lexical vs. Functional Language.

Lecture I:

Sounds: *Chapter 3*

- Universal Sounds: Babytalk (Handout Cook 1997:150-165)
- Phonology and the English Sound System
 - IPA Transcription (Cook: 1997, 286)
 - Teaching Pronunciation
 - Phonological Processing & Development
- L1 vs. L2 Phonological Interferences
- Category Perception (Handouts taken from Kuhl & Meltzoff: pp. 7-44)
 - 'U-shape' learning
- Morphology and Phonology: assimilation / allomorph
 - Functional Tense/Agreement/Aspect
 - Morphemes (Bound, Free): Rules for Verbs & Nouns

Chapter 4

Words: Knowing a Language: *Chapters 2, 4*

- Language Universals—Biological Bases of Language
 - Describing a Universal Language
 - Lexical vs. Functional Categories in Language & Early Lexical Development: Semantic vs. Syntactic
 - Word Mapping
- First Words
 - Extensions, Word Spurt
 - Development of Rule-based segmentation (Inflection)
 - Morphology

==> Exam

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Lecture II:

First Language Acquisition: *Chapters 2, 4 & 5*

- Principles and Parameters Theory: Nativism & Environmentalism
 - Review of Skinner vs. Chomsky
 - Lexical vs. Functional Categories Revisited
- Child First Language Acquisition
 - Syntactic development
- Theories of First Language Acquisition
 - Radford & Galasso (Handout 1998)
 - Feature Theory
 - Applying Theory to the Data
- Error analysis

==> Exam

Lecture III:

Second Language Learning, Teaching & Bilingualism

(Hoff Chapter 8, Lightbown & Spada Chapters 2-5)

- Theory & Methods
 - (L2) Second Language "Learning"
 - What is the logical problem of foreign language learning?*
Bley-Vroman (Handout)
 - Working Paper* (Galasso: 1998)
- L2 Interferences
 - Transfer of the "Pro-drop" Parameter (Galasso: 1999)
- Bilingualism, Pidgins & Creoles (Cook: 1993: Ch. 4, Handout)
- Code-switching
 - (Galasso, Handout)

Communicative Disorders (readings): *(Chapter 7)*

- Specific Language Impairment (SLI, Williams/Asperger's)
 - Clahsen & Hansen (In Gopnik 1997: 141ff. Handout)
 - Radford & Galasso (1998, Handouts)
 - Radford (2004, Handouts)
- Non-verbal communication

==> Exam