Course Rationale

Recent advances in psycholinguistic research and in neural imaging technologies place us in a fairly good position, at the beginning of the third millennium, to begin to make sense of some of the complicated issues involved in second language acquisition. To do so, however, one needs to cobble together pieces of research from a number of different areas, as befits any cognitive science research enterprise worth its name. My hope is that by adopting this interdisciplinary perspective, and by viewing the theoretical problems involved in light of larger issues of cognition and neural representation, we may be able to shed some new light on some well-worn topics. Note that the course will NOT address sociolinguistic or pedagogical aspects of second language acquisition. Sociolinguistic aspects are dealt with in Linguistics 177, Multilingualism, and pedagogical aspects in Linguistics 178, Second Language Acquisition Methodology.

Course Objectives

The main goals of the course will be to find out how much we can say about the mental and neural representations that underlie the process of second language acquisition, and to see if and how these representations differ from those involved in first language acquisition. Specifically, by the end of the quarter, you should be able to:

1. identify the important research emerging from a field that tends to suffer from an overabundance of rather less interesting work, and critically evaluate it in light of other important findings in second language acquisition;

2. compare converging sources of evidence across disciplines and methodologies in order to arrive at [at least partial] answers to questions of interest in this area;

3. state the implications of such research for fundamental issues in theoretical linguistics, language acquisition, and cognitive (neuro)science in general.

A further goal is to familiarize linguistics majors with basic issues of mental and neural representation within cognitive science, and to familiarize majors in other cognitive scientists disciplines with basic issues in descriptive and theoretical linguistics.

Course Structure and Requirements

The reading in this class will not be easy going because most of it is from primary sources (journal articles and book chapters). Therefore give yourself ample time; much of it will be technical and is not something that you can just skim through. Readings are due on the date under which they are listed. If at any time the reading seems to be too much or too difficult, please let me know, either individually or as a group. On the webpage you will find a link to an article titled 'A Guide to Reading and Analyzing
Academic Articles’ which may help you in your reading this quarter. This article will also be handed out in hard copy form on the first day of class.

In conjunction with the reading, you will be asked to answer a short list of seven questions pertaining to various articles throughout the quarter, probably at least one for each class period. This is intended both to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading, and to help you pull out the general ideas from the articles (in the interest of not losing the forest for the trees). You will probably be submitting the answers to these questions on WebCT, but this has not been set up yet; we will let you know once this has happened. Even when you are not asked to submit the answers to these questions, however, you should be keeping them in mind when you do the reading.

The questions are as follows:

1. What is the larger issue addressed in this study?
2. What particular hypothesis is being tested?
3. How do the authors go about testing the hypothesis (design and methodology)?
4. What results do the authors obtain?
5. How do they interpret these results?
6. Is this the only interpretation possible?
7. What is the take-home message of the study?

These assignments will count for 20% of your grade. There will also be one midterm—possibly a take-home exam—and a final. Each exam will count for 40% of your grade. My tests have a reputation of being difficult but fair, and I tend to test hard but grade easy.

Course Policies

Cheating on the homework or the exams will result in no credit for the homework or exam in question, and you will be referred to your dean for disciplinary action. This is university policy and there will be no exceptions. PLEASE NOTE: If you turn in homework or an exam that resembles homework or an exam handed in by anyone else in this class or in previous classes like this one, that constitutes cheating. Also, plagiarism is also a clear violation of the university’s academic integrity policy. Therefore, all work must be your own and no one else’s. As there has been local media coverage of cheating on the UCSD campus in recent years, and as I have had to deal with several instances of cheating during this same time period, you should know that I feel very strongly about this issue and that I will handle all cases of cheating accordingly. I truly hope there will be no cause to discuss this issue any further this quarter, but if there is, I will strictly adhere to the policy outlined in this paragraph without exception.

Syllabus and Readings

The readings will be available on electronic reserves at the library (not yet available as of 4/1/03). If enough people also want a hard copy reader, we will make that available as well.

Tuesday, 4/1: Course Overview

Thursday, 4/3: Historical Context

The Bilingual Brain

Tuesday, 4/8: Electrical Stimulation Studies


Thursday, 4/10: Neural Imaging Studies of Production


Tuesday, 4/15: Neural Imaging Studies of Comprehension 1


Thursday, 4/17: Neural Imaging Studies of Comprehension 2


Tuesday, 4/22: Electrophysiological Studies

The Critical Period Debate

Thursday, 4/24: First Pass


Tuesday, 4/29: Second Pass


Language Universals in Second Language Acquisition

Thursday, 5/1: Wh-Movement


Tuesday, 5/6: Unaccusativity and Articles


Exceptional Language Learners

Thursday, 5/8: Case Studies


Tuesday, 5/13: Group Studies


Parallels and Differences Between First and Second Language Acquisition

Thursday, 5/15: Order of Acquisition of Morphemes


Tuesday, 5/20: Acquisition of Aspect


Thursday, 5/22: Learning First and Second Languages Late

**Tuesday, 5/27:** (TENTATIVELY) NO CLASS

**Thursday, 5/29:** (TENTATIVELY) NO CLASS

**Tuesday, 6/3:** Forgetting and Relearning a Language


**Thursday, 6/5:** Quirky Stuff


**THE FINAL EXAM WILL BE ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, FROM 3:00 P.M. TO 6:00 P.M.**