



ACADIA
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

EDUC 4863: ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE

On Campus, Hybrid Format

Course Instructor: Sharon Churchill Roe

Email: Sharon.churchill@acadiau.ca

Phone: 902 585 1471

Office Location: 312 Rhodes Hall

Office hours: By request – in person or virtually (Teams/ Zoom)

We acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) People first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

School of Education faculty aim to model inclusive practices that welcome and anticipate diversity. We encourage all students to engage us in conversation about their learning so that strong and effective pedagogical relationships can be established.

Acadia University is dedicated to improving access to campus life for all students with disabilities. While we attempt to ensure that all courses are accessible, we recognize that there are barriers that need to be addressed on an individual basis. Students who require accommodations to complete coursework or otherwise fully participate in class should contact Accessible Learning Services directly as soon as possible.

For more information, please email accessible.learning@acadiau.ca or visit the office in Rhodes Hall.



WHAT IS THE COURSE ABOUT?

Course Description

This course focuses on how language is acquired, and how different theories of language learning have shaped the way that teachers teach English as an additional language. There will be sociocultural, physiological, and psychological analysis of language acquisition. The course may be taken as part of the TESOL Certificate Program.

Instructor Information

Sharon Churchill has worked as an EAP and ESL instructor for over two decades in Canada and the UK. She has undergraduate degrees in Biology and Education, a Master of Applied Linguistics, and CELTA qualifications. She is the manager of the English Language Centre at Acadia. Sharon is also an actor, musician, and avid traveller.



Learning Outcomes

The **learning outcomes** of this course are:

1. Critically examine major influences on the study of language acquisition, including Structural Linguistics, Behaviorism, Cognitive Psychology, and sociocultural frameworks.
2. Describe and compare patterns of development in first and second language acquisition.
3. Analyze key factors influencing first and additional language development, including age, input, interaction, identity, and sociocultural context.
4. Evaluate early models and contemporary theories of second language acquisition, identifying their underlying assumptions, strengths, and limitations.
5. Apply theories of language acquisition to real-world contexts, such as education, multilingual communities, or language policy, to interpret learner experiences and outcomes.

Pre-Requisites

Although this course may be taken by all interested students, it is primarily designed to be taken with EDUC 4673 and 4683 (cross-listed with EDUC 5193 and EDUC 5693), which are part of the Acadia TESOL Certificate program, for those who wish to teach English as a second or foreign language.



HOW WILL TEACHING AND LEARNING HAPPEN?

Format

This is a hybrid flipped-classroom course. This means that all lectures are done outside of scheduled class time. We will meet on a weekly basis, either in person or virtually, to engage in discussions and activities based on the module topic. You are required to have watched the lesson before joining the face-to-face session.

The course is comprised of H5P interactive lessons, review quizzes, background and extended reading and viewing materials, and assignments. The optional reading and viewing materials may be used to provide background information prior to completing the lesson or may be used afterwards to clarify and extend topics covered in the lesson. Occasionally required readings or viewings will be assigned.

This course is designed to provide flexible learning options. You can choose to access background knowledge through a textbook, supplied readings, videos, or through internet searches of key terms and concepts. Lessons are interactive videos with subtitles.

Most assignments provide options for how you would like to express your learning. Options include written papers, audio recordings, and online formats. If you would like to take a different approach to any of the assignment to better suit your needs, please feel free to discuss this with me!

Time Management

There are 10 modules in this course, as outlined below in the course schedule. Each module is expected to take 6-9 hours of work. These hours might be divided as such:

- 2 hours of class meeting time
- 1-2 hours to develop background knowledge and engaging in further topic exploration through reading, viewing, listening, searching, and discussing
- 2-3 hours to complete the interactive lesson
- 1-2 hours to work on assignments

These time frames are approximate and will depend on module expectations and the complexity or familiarity of the topic.

Learning Management System: Moodle

Moodle is the online learning environment at Acadia University School of Education. This is the system that will host the online learning materials and activities for this course.

Getting help with your Moodle account.

It is important that you can access and use Moodle as part of your study in this course. To find out more about the features and functions of Moodle, and to practice using them, visit the <https://ltid.acadiu.ca/home.html>. If something is not working as it should, contact oasupport@acadiu.ca.



Resources

Recommended readings

There is no required textbook for this course. The role of a textbook is not to provide a duplication of ideas found in the lectures, but to expand your understanding and interest. Therefore, if you like to learn with a textbook, it is important to have one that works for you. There are many introductory SLA textbooks that would provide you with an excellent grounding in this field. Below is a list of a few of my favourites. But not everyone likes being tied to one textbook. You can choose to purchase a text, or you can build your knowledge using the readings, videos and links supplied on Moodle.

*Lightbown, P. and Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages are Learned*. (4th Ed). Oxford University Press. - an approachable text for people new to the field.

*Saville Troike, M., and K. Barto (2017) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* (3rd Edition). Cambridge University Press. - an approachable text for people new to the field.

Brown, H.D. (2014). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* [6thEd]. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, Inc. - Well organized and clearly written with examples.

Hummel, K. (2014). *Introducing Second Language Acquisition: Perspectives and Practices*. Wiley Blackwell. - a little more in-depth than some, but still approachable for the general audience.

Ortega, L. (2008). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Hodder Education. - the densest of the texts, and perhaps better suited for those looking for a deeper understanding or at a graduate level.

**These are the most popular texts. Suggested readings for each Module will be listed for these two books. These texts can be found in your favourite online bookstore. There is no obligation to buy any of these texts.*

Additional Resources

Additional readings, videos, and resources will be useful for this course to develop your knowledge and understanding of teaching and course-specific content. These resources are related to concepts brought up in the lecture. They may be studies directly referenced in the lecture or may have been included here to provide additional ideas connected to the topic of the module. If you are seeking sources of evidence to support your assessment work, you will find these readings a useful starting point.

These resources can be found linked in the Introduction Page of each module.



Course Schedule

MODULE	COURSE TOPICS	READINGS FROM RECOMMENDED TEXTS ISLA: Introducing Second Language Acquisition (Saville Troike & Barto) HLL: How Languages are Learned (Lightbown & Spada) (ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE FOUND ON MOODLE)	REMINDERS/ASSIGNMENTS DUE
1	Introduction to Language Acquisition	ISLA Chapter 1	In-Class Task
2	Introduction to FLA	HLL Chapter 1	Research Analysis Proposal Due In-Class Task
3	Stages of FLA	HLL Chapter 1	In-Class Task
4	The Nature of SLA	ISLA Chapter 2 & 6 HLL Chapter 4	In-Class Task
5	Early Models of SLA	ISLA Chapter 3 HLL Chapter 4	Research Analysis Due In-Class Task
6	Linguistic Factors and Interlanguage	ISLA Chapter 3 HLL Chapter 2	In-Class Task
7	Psychological Factors 1: The Learning Process	ISLA Chapter 4	In-Class Task
8	Psychological Factors 2: Differences between Learners	ISLA Chapter 4 HLL Chapter 3	SLA Theory Project Due In-Class Task
9	Age and the Critical period Hypothesis	ISLA Chapter 4 HLL Chapter 3	In-Class Task
10	Social Factors	ISLA Chapter 5 HLL Chapter 4	In-Class Task



HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?

Assessment Schedule

EDUC 4863 Assessment task	Date due	Percent weighting	Links to Course Learning Intentions
Module Review Quizzes	Weekly	30%	1,2,3,4,5
In-Class Tasks	Weekly	30%	1,2,3,4,5
Research Proposal and Analysis	Module 2/5	5% / 15%	1,2,3
SLA Theory Project	Module 8	20%	4,5

Philosophy of Assessment

This course attracts a diverse range of learners: from teachers in training, to those with decades of teaching experience; from undergraduate students to professionals looking for a new career. This course has been designed to help all learners to explore research, theories and perspectives that are meaningful and relevant to their own teaching and learning contexts and interests.

To respect the diversity of learners, assessments are designed to be flexible. Wherever possible, I provide multiple options in assessment topics so that you can make choices that best suit your context. Many questions are multi-directional, allowing you to select the best way to address the task based on your needs and interests. There is no standard format for many of the assignments, allowing you to express your ideas in a way that best suits you, whether through speaking, writing or something else.

By allowing for flexibility in action and expression, it is my hope that you will feel more motivated and engaged through the learning process. By giving you more choice and autonomy over your learning, I hope that you will work to achieve a high quality of performance and more significant and meaningful outcomes.

Assessment Details and Instructions

Module Review Quizzes

Task Description

Each module contains a lesson followed by a review quiz which focuses on information discussed in the lesson. You will have two attempts to complete each quiz. Questions are generally True/False, Multiple choice, matching and drag and drop.

Due by date

Weekly



Weekly In-Class Tasks

Task Description

In this course, class time will be highly interactive and application-focused. Students can expect to engage in a variety of activities that help connect theories of language acquisition to real-world learning and teaching contexts. These may include guided discussions, short problem-solving tasks, analysis of classroom scenarios, collaborative group work, and hands-on activities that require applying key concepts to practical examples. Classes will often involve working with brief readings, data samples, case studies, or observation excerpts, as well as reflecting on personal language learning experiences. Overall, in-class tasks are designed to encourage active participation, critical thinking, and the ability to translate theoretical ideas into informed educational practice.

Submission Details

Tasks will be submitted following class meetings either on paper or in electronic format.

Research Proposal

Task Description

The purpose of this proposal is to help you narrow and refine your topic, clarify your research focus, and articulate why this area of language acquisition matters to you before you begin your full literature review. This will also allow for early feedback to support your success on the final assignment.

You will submit a short proposal outlining your intended research topic, your motivation for choosing it, and the questions you hope to explore through academic research.

Proposal Components

Your proposal should include the following sections:

1. Proposed Topic (1 short paragraph)
 - Clearly describe the area of second or first language acquisition you intend to investigate.
 - Be specific enough that the scope is manageable (e.g., not just “motivation,” but motivation in adult L2 learners or motivation in immersion contexts).
2. Rationale / Personal or Academic Interest (1 short paragraph)
 - Explain why you are interested in this topic.
 - You may draw on:
 - your own language learning experiences,
 - teaching or educational contexts,
 - course content that sparked your interest, or
 - broader social, educational, or policy-related concerns.
3. Guiding Research Questions (2–3 questions)
 - State the key questions you hope to explore through your review of the literature.



- These should be exploratory and analytical, not yes/no questions (e.g., How has X been studied? What patterns or debates emerge? What factors appear to shape outcomes?).
4. Preliminary Sources (optional but encouraged)
- 1–2 academic sources you have already identified, if available.

Submission Details

Approximately 400-500 words written / 5-7 minutes spoken.

Submitted to Moodle by January 25.

Research Analysis (Part 2)

Task Description

The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to explore an area of language acquisition that interests you and to practice making sense of academic research in the field. Rather than producing a formal literature review, you will engage with a small set of studies in depth, looking for patterns, questions, and implications that help you better understand how research in language acquisition works. This assignment is about understanding and thinking with research, not mastering every technical detail.

You will investigate a topic related to first or second language acquisition by reading and engaging with academic studies drawn from peer-reviewed journals or academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, ERIC, Academic Search Premier).

EDUC 4863: Select 3 studies

Your submission should be written as a connected exploration of your topic rather than a series of summaries or a highly formal literature review.

Task Components

Your assignment should address the following areas in an integrated and coherent way:

1. Introducing Your Area of Interest

- Explain the topic you chose and why it interested you.
- Situate the topic within the broader field of language acquisition (e.g., Why do researchers care about this?).

2. Making Sense of the Research

- Describe what researchers in this area have been trying to understand or explain.
- Highlight key findings, ideas, or trends that emerge across the studies you selected.
- Where studies differ, explain what seems to account for those differences (e.g., learner age, context, language, research focus).

The goal here is to show that you understand what the research is saying and why it matters.



3. Thinking About How the Research Was Done

Drawing on ideas and examples discussed in class, reflect on the research approaches used in the studies:

- What kinds of methods do researchers use to investigate this topic?
- What do these methods allow researchers to see—or not see?
- How confident do you feel in the conclusions, and why?

You are encouraged to be thoughtful and reflective rather than highly technical. The focus is on developing informed curiosity about research design.

4. Connecting Research to Real Contexts

- Discuss how the research connects to real-world language learning or teaching contexts (real or hypothetical).
- Consider how this research might influence classroom practice, educational decisions, or future research questions.

5. Reflection and Questions

Reflect on how engaging with this research has shaped your thinking about language acquisition.

- What questions does this research raise for you?
- What would you be curious to investigate further?

Example Topics

- Use of memory strategies in learning vocabulary
- The role of aptitude/motivation/anxiety/etc. in language learning
- Core versus Immersion language programs
- Effects of parental feedback on L1 acquisition
- Effects of bilingualism on people with Alzheimer's
- Using Total Physical Response methods to teach grammar
- Linguistic Imperialism
- Gender differences in language learning
- Second/Foreign Language instruction for children with learning differences
- The impact of Socioeconomic status on vocabulary development

An examination of a challenge/opportunity noted in your own learning/teaching context

Task length

Written submission: 1000–1500 words

Audio submission: 8–10 minutes

Submission Details

You may submit this assignment as a written paper, audio recording, or in another format of your choice.

Due date

February 15



SLA Theory Project

Task Description

In this project, you will present background information about one modern theory of second language acquisition, its strengths and criticisms, findings in research, and its classroom applications. With your chosen theory of SLA, you will

- Describe the principles behind the theory
- Explain how this theory accounts for at least three (of 7) of the observable phenomena in SLA. See Module 4
- Critique the theory, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the theory
- Give a short summary of how this theory has been applied to/ used in research, highlighting relevant findings (investigate 1 or 2 studies from an academic journal)
- Discuss the practical applications for this theory in the classroom by citing general principles and specific examples
- Discuss how this theory would explain why some language learners are more successful than others
- Provide a list of your references

You may choose one theory from the list below to discuss or select a theory of your own.

- Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf, Vygotsky)
- Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996)
- Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985, 1995)
- Activity Theory (Leontev, 1987)
- Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998)
- Universal Grammar in relation to SLA
- Accommodation Theory
- Acculturation Theory (Schumann, 1978)
- Complexity Theory
- Connectionism

In Module 5 we examined Krashen's Monitor Model. In Module 7 we examined the Information Processing Theory. In both lessons we addressed all the topics above. You can use relevant parts of these lessons as a model for your own theory project.



Assessment Information

The grade for this assignment will be based on your description, analysis, critique, and application of your chosen theory, as well as the clarity of your communication (written or spoken).

	With excellence (9-10 pts)	Meets objectives (7-8 pts)	Needs work (1-6 pts)
Describe the principles behind the theory.			
Explain how this theory accounts for at least three (of 7) of the observable phenomena in SLA.			
Critique the theory, discussing its strengths and weaknesses.			
Give a short summary of how this theory has been applied to/ used in research.			
Discuss the practical applications for this theory in the classroom by citing general principles and specific examples.			
Discuss how this theory would explain why some language learners are more successful than others.			
Clarity of communication			

Task length

If this is a written paper or website, sections 1-6 should be about 400-500 words long each. A presentation should generally be about 20 - 25 slides **with** additional narration or annotations (notes).

Due by date

March 15

Submission Details

This information can be presented in the form of a wiki, graphic newsletter, narrated or annotated presentation, written paper, or as a live online presentation. You may work alone or with others on this project.



HOW ARE MY RESULTS DETERMINED?

How your Final Result is determined

To pass this course, you need to demonstrate your attainment of each of the Learning Intentions. The range of grades available for assignments in this course and the final result in this course are:

Raw Score	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Grade Description
90 - 100	A+	4.33	Outstanding performance, demonstrating complete and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, concepts, skills and application.
85-89	A	4.00	Excellent performance, indicating a superior grasp of subject matter and concepts; development of relevant skills and application to a high level.
80-84	A-	3.67	
77-79	B+	3.33	Good performance, indicating thorough understanding of subject matter and concepts; development of relevant skills and application to a fairly high level.
73-76	B	3.00	
70-72	B-	2.67	Minimum adequate performance in a graduate course
Failure: Unsatisfactory performance. Academic options for students receiving less than a B- grade in a graduate course are outlined in the 2021-2022 Acadia University Calendar (page 39) See: https://registrar.acadiau.ca/files/sites/registrar/pdfs/Academic_Calendars/calendar_final.pdf			

WHAT OTHER POLICIES/PROCEDURES SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT?

There are several other policies and procedures that you should be aware of relating to requesting extensions, review of results, course completion and program continuation, attendance, children in class, cancelling class, concerns, and complaints, as well as academic integrity.

These are found at the following [link](#).

Statement of Inclusivity



Acadia University is committed to becoming a culturally safe and anti-oppressive community. This can only be achieved where there are simultaneous efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and harassment from our campus community, including the elimination of all discrimination, harassment and violence based on one's identity, including but not limited to, gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, gender expression, and Indigeneity.

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer is available to students, staff, and faculty. The fundamental objective of the Equity Office is to prevent discrimination, sexual harassment, and personal harassment from occurring, in part by managing [Acadia's Policy Against Harassment and Discrimination](#). For more information, as well as for resources for students who believe they may have experienced or witnessed discrimination, sexual harassment, or personal harassment please contact Acadia's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Polly Leonard, MSW, RSW (she/her/hers) at equity@ACADIAU.CA, and check out the [website](#).

Faculty of Education courses take place in learning environments that are inclusive of gender identity, gender expression, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, etc. Learners and educators expect to be always treated respectfully and in all interactions. Non-sexist, non-racist, non-homophobic, non-transphobic and non-heterosexist language is expected in Faculty of Education classes, course content, discussions, and assignments.

WHAT STUDENT SUPPORTS ARE THERE AT ACADIA?

There are a number of student supports at Acadia for you to access if necessary, including, but not limited to accessible learning services, the writing centre, the indigenous gathering space and resource centre, the women's centre, the equity office, the black student employment and cultural navigator, spiritual wellness, services regarding 2SLGBTQI+, and mental health support services.

The most up to date list is found on our website at the following [link](#).

