

Research on languages in contact: the importance of linguistic data

6 credits
2nd semester

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Aims and Objectives

This course is designed to provide the student with a contemporary and in-depth analysis and description of some of the most relevant aspects of two related fields, i.e., bilingualism and languages in contact, by means of the analysis of different types of linguistic data. More specifically, English and (primarily but not exclusively) Spanish grammatical categories and structures will be compared with a view to determining the differences and similarities that manifest themselves in the production of speakers from diverse linguistic contexts and with various linguistic backgrounds. This course adopts a generative approach in order to explore the consequences of these differences and similarities with respect to the acquisition process and with special emphasis on phenomena that emerge in language contact situations.

In short, the main objective of this course is to facilitate the acquisition of those concepts (both general and specific) that are instrumental, if not fundamental, to the comparison of languages in bilingual contexts.

When students have successfully completed this course, they will be familiar with the following:

- linguistic research on bilingual acquisition based on linguistic data;
- different elicitation techniques to gather both spontaneous and experimental data; and
- various analyses on phenomena that emerge in language contact situations (e.g., crosslinguistic influence, language dominance, code-switching and natural interpreting).

Course Program

The course will focus on the linguistic analysis of bilingual data as data coming from a language contact situation. And it will be broken down into the following topics:

1. Language acquisition in a nutshell
 - The language faculty
 - The acquisition of the first language (L1) and of the second language (L2)
 - Languages in contact: the concept of L1/L2 bilingualism
2. Research on language acquisition based on linguistic data
 - The importance of linguistic data

- How to work with linguistic data
- 3. Linguistic theory & linguistic data: the analysis of language contact situations
 - Bilingualism and languages in contact: crosslinguistic influence
 - Bilingualism and languages in contact: language mixing

Together with the lectures where these topics will be presented, students will have to work in groups to carry out an oral presentation on an article that fits the objectives of the course (a list of proposed articles will be provided via the UVa online campus).

Methodology

Theoretical explanations will be constantly combined with the analysis of specific data, not only to illustrate the theory, but also to put into practice the tools provided by linguistic theory in the characterization of bilingual acquisition. Students are expected to prepare for the lectures in advance so that they can contribute to debates and take an active role during class.

All materials (i.e., articles, handouts, etc.) will be made available via the UVa online campus.

All works students have to hand in must be uploaded in the corresponding activity in the LC course at the UVa online campus; no e-mail works will be accepted. Specific instructions will be provided in class and in the UVa online campus.

The work plan for the 3 topics is described below and it involves both classroom activities as well as outside classroom ones.

1. BEFORE EACH TOPIC: students will be provided with a series of materials (articles, handouts, etc.) available through the UVa online campus;
2. BEFORE THE CLASSROOM SESSIONS: students should go over the different materials made available;
3. DURING THE CLASSROOM SESSIONS: the information in the handouts will be presented and discussed in class. Students are encouraged to actively participate during these sessions; and
4. AFTER THE CLASSROOM SESSIONS: after each of the 3 topics is presented and discussed, students will have a take-home assignment that they will have to complete in 1 week and present in class.

Assessment

Students will be evaluated both individually (through assignments and a final paper) and as a group (through their performance in the oral presentation). More specifically, students will be evaluated on the basis of the following tasks:

- assignments (30%). After each of the 3 main topics is presented and discussed, students will have a take-home assignment that they will have to present and defend in class. Each assignment builds on the previous one and the work involved to complete each of them is based on research planning, data collection and data analysis.

- group oral presentation (20%). Prior to the beginning of the course, students will be given a number of articles that must be read by all. Each article will be presented orally in class by a group of 2 or 3 students. A pdf version of the articles will be provided to all students via the UVa online campus.
- final paper (50%). Students will submit a final paper in which they are expected to provide an in-depth and scientific analysis of a specific grammatical structure or linguistic issue through the analysis of linguistic data. The analysis should point to phenomena that emerge in language contact situations and should also include a theoretical account of the structure/issue to be discussed. It is advisable that projects use the study conducted in the assignments as a point of departure. If students would like to choose a topic different from the one that they addressed in the assignments, the topic must be submitted to the professors for approval first; this proposal must also include a tentative bibliography. All projects must be uploaded as a word document in the UVa online campus before the due date.

A calendar for the different activities (i.e., assignments, oral presentations, and final papers) will be posted in the UVa online campus.

Bibliography and Resources

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Schedule

The course meets once a week, during the five weeks of the first teaching period at the University of Valladolid and in the MA seminar room in the English department.

Course schedule, dates for oral presentations as well as deadlines for the different activities will be posted in the UVa online campus prior to the beginning of the course.