

Translational Research in Second Language Acquisition: Bridging the Research-Pedagogy Divide

Course Designation: APLNG/SLA (Graduate-level)

Credit Hours: 3

Semester/Term:

Meeting Days/Time/Location:

Instructor Information

Instructor: Katherine Kerschen

Email:

Office Phone:

Office:

Office Hours:

Course Description

In its original iteration in the life and medical sciences, the term “translational research” refers to research that aims to take results from basic science and translate them into direct clinical or therapeutic applications, as well as feed outcomes and insights from clinical applications back into theory-building. In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the term can be applied to research that takes concepts about (second) language learning and translates them into classroom practice. To some extent, translational research has long existed in SLA within the sub-field of “Instructed Second Language Acquisition” (ISLA). According to Sato and Loewen (2019b), “The overarching research agenda of [ISLA] is to understand second language (L2) learning and teaching issues in instructional settings and examine pedagogical interventions that help learners develop L2 skills more efficiently and effectively” (p. 1). Furthermore, they argue, “ISLA researchers endeavor to provide teachers with evidence-based pedagogy by conducting empirical investigations” (ibid). Therefore, at its core, ISLA is applied research with translational implications.

However, in recent years people have paid increased attention to the fact that research findings are in fact not finding their way to second language (L2) educators, and thus, by extension, to the L2 classroom (e.g., Marsden & Kasproicz, 2017; Sato & Loewen, 2019a). Recent edited volumes with titles such as *Evidence-based Second Language Pedagogy* (Sato & Loewen, 2019) and *Doing SLA Research with Implications for the Classroom: Reconciling Methodological Demands and Pedagogical Applicability* (DeKeyser & Prieto Botana, 2019) point to the need to examine the presumed research-to-pedagogical practice pipeline more critically. Additionally, the reverse

aspect of translational research is often neglected by ISLA researchers: how can research on instructional practices contribute to theories of SLA?

A major goal of this course is to move our thinking about the connection between research and pedagogy beyond the “pedagogical implications” paragraph that was once a hallmark of many SLA studies. After surveying the current state of the research-pedagogy “link” (or “divide,” depending on your perspective), we’ll dive into a more detailed exploration of major sub-topics in ISLA and examine various methodological approaches, though our primary focus will be classroom-based research. We’ll learn how to analyze the contributions of empirical research to both scientific knowledge and pedagogical practice and then apply this knowledge to designing research studies that don’t just have implications for pedagogy, but are informed by pedagogy (meaning the needs of actual language educators) and—where possible—can contribute to our understandings of the mechanisms of language learning.

Finally, in addition to theoretical and methodological concerns, we’ll consider issues such as accessibility of research findings for non-academics, focusing on formal initiatives, for example the OASIS database, as well as use of new media platforms such as YouTube.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify key concepts in translational research and ISLA.
- Understand and explain current issues in the exchange of information between SLA researchers and language educators.
- Analyze the translational possibilities for empirical studies that address specific aspects of language learning and instruction.
- Critically evaluate the contribution of academic articles to translational research and the research-pedagogy dialogue.
- Design an original empirical research project in the field of ISLA that is translational in nature and informed by needs in L2 pedagogy.
- Clearly and effectively communicate research findings in oral and written modes to both expert (academic) and lay person audiences.

Required Materials

There is no required textbook for this course, but the following two edited volumes are solid resources for students and researchers interested in this topic and we will read several excerpts from them:

- Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Evidence-based second language pedagogy: A collection of instructed second language acquisition studies*. Routledge.

- DeKeyser, R. M., & Prieto Botana, G. (Eds.). (2019). *Doing SLA research with implications for the classroom: Reconciling methodological demands and pedagogical applicability*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Course readings will mainly consist of scholarly journal articles from the fields of (I)SLA, foreign language education, and applied linguistics. These will be made available on the LMS course page.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Participation – 10%

This is a discussion-based seminar, which means that consistent, active participation is required. You are expected to come to every class session having thoroughly read the assigned readings so that you can meaningfully contribute to that day's discussion and activities.

Presentation and class discussion lead – 15%

Once during the semester, you will be responsible for choosing an article for the class to read (related to that week's topic) and then giving a presentation on the article and leading the following class discussion. In addition to presenting the aims, methods, and findings of the article, you should evaluate the extent to which the article contributes to the research-pedagogy dialogue and/or to the larger project of translational research. The article you choose must be an empirical article that arguably falls under the umbrella of ISLA and is recent, i.e., published in 2018 or later. You should confer with the professor two weeks in advance of your presentation date in order to receive approval for your selected article and have time to share the article with your classmates to read.

Your presentation should be approximately 30 minutes long, including 10 minutes allotted to questions. You should aim for 20-30 minutes for the subsequent discussion. Feel free to get creative with how you structure the discussion. For example, you could organize an in-class group activity or ask your classmates to submit questions in advance.

Two short papers – 30%

Paper #1: Compare the teacher and researcher perspectives on the flow of information in the research-pedagogy dialogue, drawing on our course readings as well as additional sources. Then analyze ways in which the ISLA research community is trying to disseminate research findings and their pedagogical implications (e.g., OASIS summaries, the different types of articles in *Language Teaching* we discussed in class, or other publication avenues that you find on your own). Do you think these methods are likely to succeed, based on what you've learned about the current state of the "dialogue"?

Paper #2: Select an empirical ISLA study on the topic of your choosing and write a “Research and Pedagogical Proposals” section for that study, following the example of the chapters in *Evidence-based Second Language Pedagogy* (Sato & Loewen, 2019). Provide justification for your suggestions, drawing on your knowledge of the field and our course readings.

Each paper should be approximately 1000 words long and formatted in APA style.

OASIS summary – 10%

For this assignment you will write an article summary to be included in the OASIS database. OASIS summaries are one-page summaries of research articles written in non-technical language and openly available online so that they are accessible to language educators and other people outside of academia. OASIS has specific guidelines for selecting articles and writing summaries; these will be discussed in more detail in advance of the assignment due date. In addition, this assignment will include a peer review element: you and your classmates will provide feedback on each other’s work before submitting the summaries to OASIS.

Final paper/project – 35%

Your final project will consist of a research proposal for an original empirical study on a topic in the field of ISLA. The aims of the study must be translational in nature (broadly construed) and informed by needs in L2 pedagogy. Your proposal must contain the basic components of a scholarly research article, minus the results and discussion. Specifically, this includes: rationale and motivation for the study, review of the literature, research questions and hypotheses/predictions, details of the study design and methodology, and sample data collection materials.

There will be several preliminary steps in the project that must be completed throughout the semester before the final proposal can be written. These include seeking input from language educators on the study topic and aims and submitting an abstract and outline for peer review by your classmates, among others. More details about each element of the project as well as deadlines will be available on the LMS course page.

The final paper should be approximately 5000 words long and formatted in APA style.

Course Schedule

Dates and assignments are subject to change. Check the LMS course page for updates.

Week	Topic	Due
1	What is translational research? What is ISLA?	Loewen (2020) pp. 1-18*
2	Research-Pedagogy Dialogue: The Researcher Perspective	Loewen (2020) pp. 228-238 Chong (2020)
3	Research-Pedagogy Dialogue: The Teacher Perspective	Marsden & Kasprovicz (2017) Sato & Loewen (2019a)
4	Research Accessibility and Transparency	Marsden, Trofimovich, & Ellis (2019) Marsden (2020)
5	Research Methodology	Selected chapters from Loewen & Sato (2017) and DeKeyser & Prieto Bonata (2019) (<i>refer to the LMS for your group assignments and corresponding readings</i>)
		Short Paper #1
6	L2 Learning Processes <i>In-class: Peer review</i>	Student-selected reading(s), plus additional articles as necessary OASIS Summary draft
7	Instructional Approaches	Student-selected reading(s), plus additional articles as necessary
8	Acquisition of Linguistic Features (1) – Vocabulary and Grammar	Nation (2011) Student-selected reading(s) OASIS Summary final version
9	Acquisition of Linguistic Features (2) – <i>[precise topics based on student interests]</i>	Student-selected reading(s), plus additional articles as necessary
10	Learning Contexts and Individual Differences	Student-selected reading(s), plus additional articles as necessary Short Paper #2
11	Learner and Teacher Psychology	Student-selected reading(s), plus additional articles as necessary Final Paper Topic approved by instructor
12	Workshopping final paper ideas <i>In-class: Peer review</i>	Abstract and Outline for Final Paper
13	<i>No class- Thanksgiving Break</i>	
14	Revisiting ISLA and SLA Theory	Ortega (2015)

- 15 Revisiting the Research-Pedagogy Spada (2019)
Link Henshaw, F. "Research-Informed Pedagogy and Pedagogy-Informed Research." Webinar given to the ACTFL Research SIG, October 26, 2021. (in-class)

Finals Week

Final Paper

**The readings listed here are representative but do not constitute the full reading list*

References

- Chong, S. W. (2020). The role of research synthesis in facilitating research–pedagogy dialogue. *ELT Journal*, 74(4), 484-487.
- Loewen, S. (2020). *Introduction to instructed second language acquisition* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Loewen, S., & Sato, M. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition*. Taylor & Francis.
- Marsden, E. J. (2020). Methodological transparency in applied linguistics and its consequences for the quality and scope of research. In J. McKinley, & H. Rose (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 15-28). Routledge.
- Marsden, E., & Kasprowicz, R. (2017). Foreign language educators' exposure to research: Reported experiences, exposure via citations, and a proposal for action. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(4), 613-642.
- Marsden, E., Trofimovich, P., & Ellis, N. (2019). Extending the reach of research: Introducing open accessible summaries at *Language Learning*. *Language Learning*, 69(1), 11-17.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2011) Research into practice: Vocabulary. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 529-539.
- Ortega, L. (2015). Second language learning explained? SLA across 10 contemporary theories. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 245–272). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (2019a). Do teachers care about research? The research–pedagogy dialogue. *ELT Journal*, 73(1), 1-10.
- Sato, M., & Loewen, S. (2019b). Toward evidence-based second language pedagogy: Research proposals and pedagogical recommendations. In M. Sato & S. Loewen (Eds.), *Evidence-Based Second Language Pedagogy* (pp. 1-23). Routledge.
- Spada, N. (2019). Balancing methodological rigor and pedagogical relevance. In R. DeKeyser & G. Prieto Botana (Eds.), *Doing SLA research with implications for the classroom: Reconciling methodological demands and pedagogical applicability* (pp. 201-215). John Benjamins Publishing Company.