
Theories of Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction

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Course Description

- Learning a second language is a key factor scientific and intercultural knowledge.
- It fosters international understanding and tolerance.
- The field of Second Language Acquisition/Learning (SLA), though quite young, has been extensively studied
- This course aims at equipping students with general knowledge about SLA and SLA theories.
- We will study theories in/of SLA



Course objectives

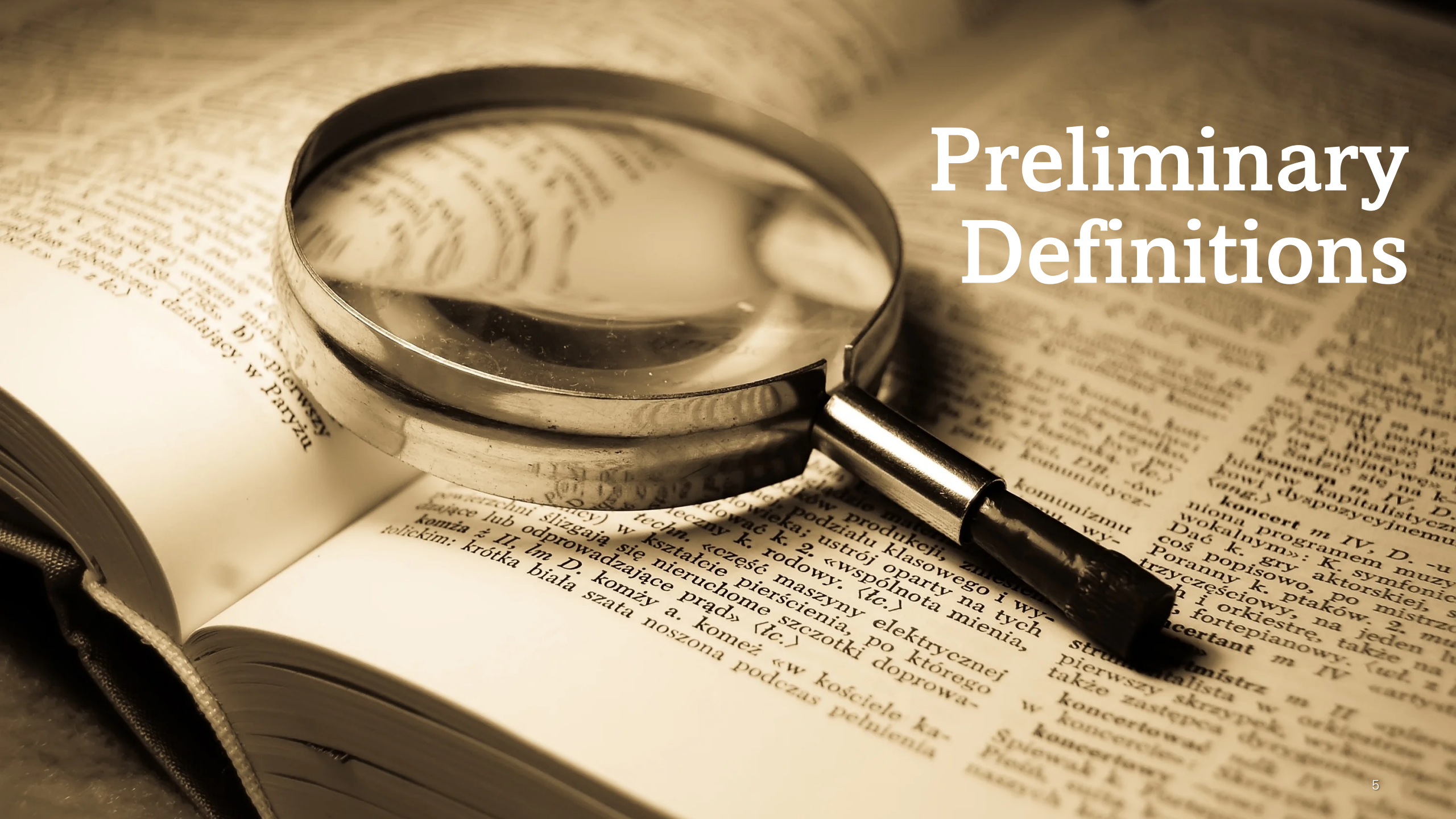


- By the end of this course, learners will be able to:
 - Distinguish between theories, models, constructs, hypotheses...
 - Differentiate among various theories on language learning and development
 - Distinguish between mainstream theories and sociocultural theories, and
 - Show their understanding of theories on L1, L2 and multilingual acquisition and learning
 - Show the understanding of Krashen's theory of SLA
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- Definition: Theories, models, constructs, and hypotheses
- Language acquisition: basics
- Understanding SLA
- Theories in SLA
- A Theory of SLA

Preliminary Definitions



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- **A theory**: a framework for understanding relationships between observable facts. It helps to describe, explain, and predict. (sociocultural)
 - **A model**: a body of facts for direct intervention. It describes processes of phenomena for direct action (Task-centered practice)
 - **A method**: a tool of technique used in practice (protocol analysis)
 - **A perspective**: theories + environmental factors, from your standpoint
 - **A construct**: a feature or characteristic of a theory. An abstract concept that is specifically chosen (or “created”) to explain a given phenomenon. (4 skills)
 - **A variable**: A quantity that can vary. A measurable representation of a construct. (exposure to L2)
 - **A hypothesis**: an idea about a single phenomenon or relation between variables. This idea or relation is to be tested or verified.

Language Acquisition: Basics



What is language acquisition?

- Language acquisition refers to the way we develop native language.
 - It is the process through which language competence and performance develop
 - ...the process through which we develop speaking, writing, (or the use of sign language) in meaningful or appropriate ways to communicate.
 - The basic stages are:
 - babbling
 - one word (holophrastic or monosyllabic speech)
 - two word, lacking inflections or other syntactic/morphological markers
 - telegraphic speech, with mostly content/lexical words, lacking function words
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STAGES	TYPICAL AGE	DESCRIPTION
Babbling	6-8 months	Repetitive CV patterns (<i>bababa; dadada; mamama</i>)
One-word stage (<i>one-morpheme</i> or <i>one-unit</i>) or holophrastic stage	9-18 months	Single open-class words or word stems
Two-word stage	18-24 months	"mini-sentences" with simple semantic relations
Telegraphic stage or early multiword stage (<i>multi-morpheme</i>)	24-30 months	Telegraphic sentence structures of <i>lexical</i> rather than <i>functional</i> or <i>grammatical</i> morphemes
Multiword stage	30+ months	<i>Grammatical</i> or <i>functional</i> structures emerge

An example of child language

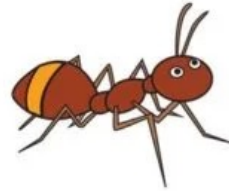
- My teacher holded the baby rabbits and we patted them.
- Did you say your teacher held the baby rabbits?
- Yes.
- What did you say she did?
- She holded the baby rabbits and we patted them.
- Did you say she held them tightly?
- No, she holded them loosely.

(Cazden 1972)



What is acquired

Aa



ant



astronaut



apple

- Phonetic units
 - Phonological units
 - Morphological units
 - Lexical units
 - Syntactic combinations
 - Semantic facts
 - Pragmatic facts
 - Sociolinguistic facts
 - ...
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Language acquisition and language learning

- **Acquisition** is the development of an ability, a skill, a habit, or quality
 - **Language acquisition** is an **unconscious** process occurring in a child developing first language
 - **Learning** is a change in the learner's knowledge attributable to experience
 - **Language learning** is a more **conscious** process occurring in second language development
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Language acquisition and language socialization

- Language socialization research investigates how the processes of linguistic and cultural development are interlinked, and how these processes vary across cultural contexts.
 - It studies how learners come to master the situated discourse practices of their communities and engage in socially and culturally significant activities.
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Multilingual Acquisition

- “The consecutive and simultaneous acquisition of three or more languages” (Cenoz, 2000: 39)
 - The language development of learners exposed to three or more languages
 - Reasons:
 - Mobility of world population
 - Diplomacy and international relations
 - Economic, political and technological development
 - ...
 - Main issue: Cross-linguistic Influence (CLI) or language transfer (factors: typology, order of acquisition, recency, language status...)
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On Second Language Acquisition

What is SLA?

- Second language acquisition is learning a second language after a first language has been acquired.
 - It is the study of how second languages are learned.
 - In other words, it is the study of the acquisition of a non-primary language; that is, the acquisition of a language beyond the native (L1) language.
 - It is often referred to as or sequential language acquisition because it comes after another (or others)
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SLA: A cross-disciplinary field

- SLA and Linguistics
 - SLA and Psychology (neuroscience, cognition, perception, identity, autonomy, motivation, emotion)
 - SLA and Anthropology
 - SLA and Sociology (social systems, social relations, politics...)
 - SLA and Information Technology (Educational technologies, AI...)
 - ...
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Stages of SLA

- Pre-production or silent/receptive stage
 - Early production stage
 - Speech emergence stage
 - Beginning fluency stage
 - Intermediate fluency stage
 - Advanced fluency stage
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SLA, Acculturation and Enculturation

- Acculturation: “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. (Redfield, et. al., 1936, P. 149)
 - It is a dual process affecting the members of two or more cultural groups as each adapts to the presence of the other (Berry, 1997).
 - Enculturation refers to the learning of a culture’s values, beliefs and norms during development, or from cultural change, which are changes in a culture resulting from innovation, invention and discovery.
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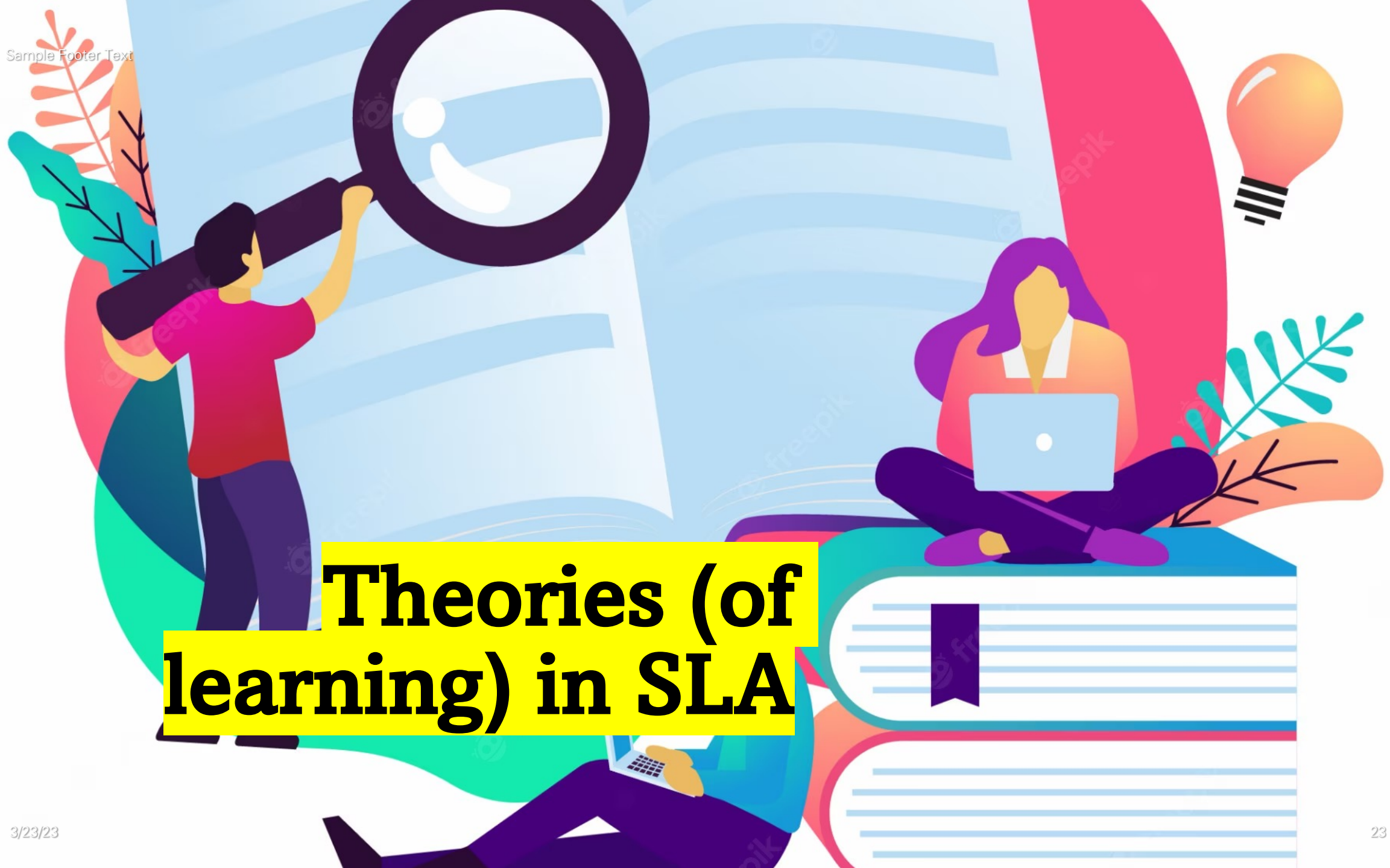
Critical Period Hypothesis in SLA

- In SLA, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) holds that the function between learners' age and their susceptibility to second language input is non-linear.
 - Derived from biology, the CP concept was introduced into the field of language acquisition by Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts in *Speech and Brain Mechanisms* 1959 and refined in Eric Lenneberg's *Biological Foundations of Language* 1967.
 - Lenneberg argued that language acquisition needed to take place between age two and puberty (2 – 14 years-old)
 - Though Lenneberg's theory was mostly used in first language acquisition, it has been applied to SLA
 - Puberty marks a dramatic decrease in the acquisition of language...
 - less strong formulation reads “an inability to acquire native-like competence/performance”
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“Remember that for the purposes of learning languages, the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid after the age of nine” (Penfield & Roberts, 1959)

Critiques of CPH

- See e.g. Birdsong, D. (1992); Loup *et al.* 1994; Epstein, Flynn and Martohardjono (1996): White and Genesee (1996)
 - Schmidt, R. 1983 (study of Wes 33 y.o.) vs Schumann's acculturation/pidginization model (1978) in the case study of Alberto
 - These studies have showed the limits of CPH in SLA
 - The limits of grammaticality judgment tests
 - Differences in the acquisition of different language skills
 - **The case study of Julie** (Georgette Loup, Elizabeth Boustagui, Manal El Tigi and Martha Moselle 1994 Reexamining the Critical Period Hypothesis: A Case Study of Successful Adult SLA in a Naturalistic Environment)
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Theories (of learning) in SLA

Structuralism

Behaviorism

Cognitivism, mentalism, nativism/innateness

Information processing theory

Interaction theory

Constructivism

Functionalism

Connectivism

Structuralism

- A framework for conception, interpretation and analysis of aspects of human cognition, behavior, culture, and experience, which focuses on relationships of contrast between elements in a conceptual system.
 - A focus on system and structures rather than function.
 - From Ferdinand de Saussure's works in linguistics, posthumously published in 1916
 - Emile Durkheim, Claude Levi Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Louis Althusser...
 - In education, the objective will consist in building correct structures in paradigms (relation in *absentia*) and syntagms (relation in *praesentia*)
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Behaviorism

- Ivan P. Pavlov, John B. Watson, B. F. Skinner
 - Habit formation through stimulus
 - Associative learning
 - Classical conditioning (Pavlov, Watson)
 - *An unconditioned stimulus (UCS) automatically triggers an involuntary response (UCR) (food_{UCS} and salivation_{UCR})*
 - *A neutral stimulus (NS) associated with UCS automatically triggers a conditioned response (bell_{NS}+food_{UCS} and salivation_{UCR})*
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- Operant conditioning (Thorndike, Skinner)
 - *A voluntary response is followed by a reinforcing stimulus*
 - *The voluntary response is more likely to be emitted by the organism*
 - *A reinforcer is any stimulus that increases the frequency of a behavior*
 - *Reinforcement by reward*
 - *Extinction by punishment*
 - Learning is a change in behavior through external stimuli
 - “Responses that produce a satisfying effect in a particular situation become more likely to occur again in that situation, and responses that produce a discomforting effect become less likely to occur again in that situation” E. Thorndike, the Law of Effect
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Cognitivism

- Mentalism, innateness, nativism
 - Noam Chomsky (against Behaviorism),
 - Jean Piaget (Sensorimotor, Preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational),
 - Benjamin Bloom (Taxonomy of Cognitive Development: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation)
 - Cognitivism is a theory based on thought processes behind/accounting for behavior.
 - It involves the study of mental processes such as sensation, perception, attention, encoding, memory, and language processing
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Information processing theory

- Edward C. Tolman, George Miller, John William Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin
- Information processing theory is an approach to cognitive development studies that aims to explain how information is encoded into memory.
- It is based on the idea that humans do not merely respond to stimuli from the environment.
- Instead, humans process the information they receive.
- Learning is an internal and complex process which involves mental processes
- ~~Information Storage. Cognitive Processes. Executive Cognition~~

Interaction theory

- The theory that language is acquired from an interaction of a human's innate biological capabilities to acquire language with exposure to language in the environment in which the child is developing.
 - Jerome Bruner, George Mead, Herbert Blumer
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Humanism

- Humanistic language teaching is an approach based on the principle that the whole being, emotional and social, needs to be engaged in learning, not just the mind. ...
 - a humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of the inner world of students; their thoughts, feelings and emotions are put into the forefront of development.
 - Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, ...
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Constructivism

- Immanuel Kant: a priori knowledge vs. a posteriori knowledge),
 - John Dewey: learner in control of acquisition and instructor as facilitator),
 - Jerome Bruner: discovery learning ... (see social constructivism)
 - Friedrich Froebel (Kindergarten), Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori,
 - Jean Piaget: the individual is at the center of the knowledge creation and acquisition process, and hierarchical cognitive development
 - Piaget rejected the idea that learning was the passive assimilation of given knowledge.
 - learners actively construct knowledge by creating and testing their own theories of the world.
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Social constructivism

- Lev Vygotsky
 - Jerome Bruner: discovery learning and scaffolding
 - James V. Wertsch: semiotic mediation in the social origins of cognitive development.
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Sociocultural theory

- Wundt, Cole (socio-cultural-historical psychology 1990), Shweder, and Cultural Psychology
 - Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria: sociohistorical, and cultural-historical, human action
 - Bruner
 - Wertsch
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Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

- Albert Bandura
 - Social Learning Theory... 1960s
 - It's about how people acquire cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral competencies,
 - and how they motivate and regulate their behavior and create social systems that organize and structure their real life.
 - The social portion acknowledges the social origins of much human thought and action;
 - The cognitive portion recognizes the influential contribution of cognitive processes to human motivation, affect, and action.
 - "Of the many cues that influence behavior, at any point in time, none is more common than the actions of others." (Bandura, 1986, p. 206)
 - Learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior.
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Functionalism

- Functionalism is an approach to language development that focuses on the relationship between language form and social meaning. (Emmit et al. 2015)
 - That is, language is not so much a system of rules as posed by Chomsky, but a means of performing particular socially communicative functions.
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Connectivism

- Connectivism is a model of learning that can guide first year advising through “the integration of principles explored as chaos, network, and complexity, and self-organization theories” as well as an “understanding that decisions are based on rapidly altering foundations” (Siemens, 2004, para. 23).
 - NETWORKS, WORLDS, AND TIES
 - Connectivism is the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organization theories. Learning is a process that occurs within nebulous environments of shifting core elements—not entirely under the control of the individual.
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Complexity Theory

- Diane Larsen-Freeman (2011). A Complexity Theory Approach to Second Language Development/Acquisition. in Atkinson, D. (ed.) *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*. Routledge: New York.
 - Based on James Gleick's Chaos Theory. (1987)
 - "To me (these research designs) denied the commonsense understanding that SLA processes were complex, situated, and likely multivariate" 2011.
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**Theory of SLA:
Stephen Krashen**

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- We acquire language the same way... just like digestion system, vision system
 - We all acquire language through one way: through comprehensible input, when we understand what people tell us. Not how they say it.
 - So anything that helps input comprehensible will make language education effective. (the input hypothesis)...
 - so talking is not practicing.
 - Speaking ability emerges gradually as you practice comprehensible inputs (authentic materials and contexts)
 - Self selected pleasure reading, pleasure movies, TV shows
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- VOLUNTARY SUSTAINED READING
 - ...a learner's access to great deal of highly interesting, comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003).
 - James Asher and Harris Winitz discussed the importance of comprehension
 - Krashen is applying the Comprehension Hypothesis to the field of second language acquisition.
 - In the field of reading instruction, Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith hypothesized that "we learn to read by reading, " we learn to read by understanding what is on the page.
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Krashen's SLA Hypotheses

- THE ACQUISITION-LEARNING HYPOTHESIS
 - THE NATURAL ORDER HYPOTHESIS
 - THE MONITOR HYPOTHESIS
 - THE INPUT HYPOTHESIS
 - THE AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS
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The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

- It states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language.
 - The first way is language *acquisition*, a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language. Language
 - acquisition is a subconscious process
 - The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language *learning*. We will use the term "learning" henceforth to refer to conscious knowledge of a second language
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The Natural Order Hypothesis

- The acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order.
 - Acquirers of a given language tend to acquire certain grammatical structures early, and others later.
 - The agreement among individual acquirers is not always 100%, but there are clear, statistically significant, similarities.
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The Monitor Hypothesis

- Acquisition "initiates" our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency.
 - Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor.
 - Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been "produced" by the acquired system.
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The Input Hypothesis

- We acquire, in other words, only when we understand language that contains structure that is "a little beyond" where we are now.
 - Compelling pleasant comprehensible input vs. traditional skill building
 - E.g Sustained Free Voluntary Pleasure Reading
 - The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis says that we acquire language when we understand what we hear or read. Our mastery of the individual components of language ("skills") is the result of getting comprehensible input.
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- “In Krashen (1981), I hypothesized that the conscious learning and application of rules of grammar is subject to strict conditions: The learner has to:
 - 1) know the rule, a daunting challenge in light of the number of grammatical rules and their complexity and ambiguity;
 - 2) has to be thinking about correctness;
 - 3) needs to have time to retrieve and apply the rules. In studies claiming that grammar study has a positive effect, these conditions were met, and the results reported have been very modest and fragile.” (Krashen, 2003).
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The Affective Filter Hypothesis

- The Affective Filter hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process.
 - The Affective Filter falls within three categories:
 - Motivation
 - Self-esteem
 - Anxiety
 - **Comprehensible inputs in a low anxiety environment!!!**
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Check your understanding of the course

- Could say how important a theory is in scientific inquiry?
 - Compare and contrast cognitivism theory and sociocultural theory
 - What is the main difference between acquisition and learning?
 - What does Krashen mean by 'comprehensible input'?
 - How important is the Monitor Hypothesis in Krashen's theory of SLA?
 - Could we find any common ground between Operant Conditioning and Cognitivism?
 - What does the case study of Julie (1994) tell us about the Critical Period Hypothesis?
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