Final project guidelines

The topic

1. Find an area of research that you’ll be interested in learning about (e.g. pragmatics, syntax, phonology, semantics, etc.)

2. Find a structure/phenomenon you’ll like to learn about (only one structure, for example “the definite article ‘the’”)

2.1. Then your topic will be “The acquisition of the definite article ‘the’ by foreign/second language learners”

3. Once you have chosen a structure/phenomenon, you’ll need to do a preliminary search of definitions and/or prior research on it in order to prepare an abstract of why and how you’ll plan to do your research.

4. Prepare the first advance where you present your topic, structure/phenomenon, and an idea of how you are going to carry out your research (including methodology, data-collection methods and analyses)

4.1. In order to have an idea on how to prepare the methodology section, we encourage you to read in advance Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991) “Second Language Acquisition Research Methodology” and “SLA: Types of Data Analyses”. Read only the sections that will help you narrow your topic (This is part of a research project).

The participant(s)

5. You’ll need to find one learner (or two maximum).

6. After a diagnostic interview you’ll need to determine this learner’s level of English and collect demographic information (Gender, age, years of study, level of achievement, contact with English, etc.).

7. Then, you’ll need to determine whether this learner will be suitable to develop your research topic. If he/she is not suitable, then you’ll need to interview another one until you find the one that will be suitable for your study.

8. This process may take several attempts, we recommend you start right after you choose and we approve your topic.

The Literature Review

9. The literature review is the skeleton of your study. It is what others call the “theoretical framework”; therefore, you’ll need to start reading sources (from journals and reliable books)
about the topic you chose. This will help you understand what you can and cannot do with your topic. These articles will serve you as examples of what a research report looks like. Once you have chosen the articles/books that may help you, you’ll need to summarize each one and report what the authors have done with the topic.

10. Prepare a report of the findings and methodologies each selected article is about (See attached form for an idea of the kind of data you’ll need to gather from each article/book).

**The Research Question**

11. Based on the literature review and your background knowledge, you will be ready to write a research question. This research question will guide through your research design. It should include in written form the structure/phenomenon you are studying, the methodology you are using, and the variables you are going to study. An example would be:

11.1. Does knowledge of generic nouns help learners of English as a Foreign language to acquire the definite article “the”?

**Methodology**

12. This is the most important part of a research project; therefore, you’ll need to be particularly attentive to what you read and how you would like to implement your research.

13. In this section, you’ll need to include any instrument that you’ll use in your research design, any procedure (in detail) or techniques that you’ll follow to collect the data.

14. Furthermore, you’ll need to think and jot down what you are planning to do with the recordings/data gathered.

15. The instruments you use have to be designed to elicit (these are called elicitation instruments) the structure/phenomenon you want to study.

15.1. Depending on the research question, you’ll need to collect data two or three times. We recommend you talk to us in order to get some previous guidance on how to do this. We’ll go over the methodology techniques in class, but you are welcome to bring any question and concerns to the office hours.

16. Here you’ll also have to think of the kind of data analyses you would like to conduct (SOC/TLU, etc.)

17. After you complete this section, you’ll be ready to conduct your research.

17.1. Prepare a report (this is called a research proposal) and hand it on October 17/2007. This report should include an introduction, the literature review, a description of your participant, and the proposed methods section, and proposal of how the data will be analyzed.

**Data-collection and Data analyses**

18. As mentioned in 14.1 the kind of data will depend on your research question. Therefore, you’ll need to write a very well informed research question in order to create a sound instrument that will elicit the data you need.
19. The data needs to be collected at different intervals (at least a month apart) in order to be able to see acquisition. Therefore, plan ahead and schedule your data collection carefully in order to be able to finish the project on time.

19.1. Those of you collecting interviews or recorded data, need to start the following week after you present your topic. There will be at least three times you’ll meet with your informant (participant).

19.1.1. The first one is to gather preliminary information, but if you can interview him/her, in this first meeting, then you’ll have one time point to analyze (Then you’ll only have to meet with him/her once more because you’ll already have a set of data).

19.1.2. The second one should be the first interview where you apply your instruments and collect the first set of data, if you have not done the interview in the first meeting.

19.1.3. The third one is the second time you collect data that will serve you as the point of comparison to determine any type of acquisition of the structure/phenomenon you intend to analyze.

20. After you collect the data, you’ll need to transcribe the entire interview and prepare it as an appendix of your final report. This will help you analyze the data because you’ll be able to see the dialogues in written form. Be very careful when you transcribe and when in doubt please ask a classmate to check it for you. Do this with both sets of data.

21. Once you transcribe the data and have it in written form, you can proceed to the data analysis.

Data Analysis

22. The data analysis will be conducted following previous research. You’ll need to follow what others have done and improve a little the data analysis.

The Results

23. After you conclude the data analysis, you’ll need to report your results. Results should be reported as objectively as possible. Therefore, you’ll need to keep a journal of every single decision you make and how this decision affects your judgment of what the learner does. The results will help you write the discussion section of the paper because they tell you what the experiment yielded.

The discussion

24. In the discussion section, you’ll need to provide us with an informed and well-thought-out account of what you think the process or acquisition is and how your findings fit in the big picture “SLA research on your topic and in the field in general”.

Conclusions and future research

25. In this section you’ll have to provide the limitation of the project and suggestions on how to improve it as well as the possible areas for future research on your topic.
Bibliography

26. All citations and bibliographical work should be prepared following the American Psychological Association Style Manual (4th or 5th Edition).

26.1. For an example of a complete manuscript please refer to the APA Manual. You’ll find a complete and detailed example with citations and bibliography as well as all the other components of a research paper.

Appendices

27. All data collected as well as their transcripts should be prepared as appendices and attached at the end of the final project.

28. A copy of all instruments and data analyses charts should also be attached as appendices.