

**TITLE :** Usage-based Second Language Acquisition

**ABSTRACT :**

Usage-based approaches to language learning hold that we learn constructions (form-function mappings, conventionalized in a speech community) from language usage by means of general cognitive mechanisms (exemplar-based, rational, associative learning). The language system emerges from the conspiracy of these associations. Although frequency of usage drives learning, not all constructions are equally learnable by all learners. Even after years of exposure, adult second language learners focus more in their language processing upon open-class words than on grammatical cues. I present a usage-based analysis of this phenomenon in terms of fundamental principles of associative learning: Low salience, low contingency, and redundancy all lead to form-function mappings being less well learned. Compounding this, adult acquirers show effects of learned attention and blocking as a result of L1-tuned automatized processing of language. I review a series of experimental studies of learned attention and blocking in second language acquisition (L2A). I describe educational interventions targeted upon these phenomena. Form-focused instruction recruits learners' explicit, conscious processing capacities and allows them to notice novel L2 constructions. Once a construction has been represented as a form-function mapping, its use in subsequent implicit processing can update the statistical tallying of its frequency of usage and probabilities of form-function mapping, consolidating it into the system.

**Background Reading**

Ellis, N. C. & Wulff, S. (2020). Usage-based approaches to L2 acquisition. In VanPatten, B., Keating, G. D., & Wulff, S. (Eds.), *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An introduction*. (pp. 63-82). New York & London: Routledge. [download](#)

Ellis, N. C. (2022) Second language learning of morphology. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, 6(1), 34–59. [download the pdf article](#).