

ESSAY TITLES

On this page you'll find some suggestions for Essay Titles for use in class or seminar sessions or for students to view independently.

The following list gives the essay titles offered to my students in two courses that I teach at Roehampton University, Language Acquisition and Child Discourse.

1. Assess the claim that language development inevitably proceeds from and is based on non-linguistic cognitive skills.
2. What are the implications of studies on the effects of linguistic input to children and their early social interactions with their caregivers for Chomsky's 'innatist' approach?
3. How have studies of language development in 'exceptional circumstances' contributed to our understanding of 'normal' language Development?
(In this context, 'exceptional circumstances' refers to: children with sight or hearing disabilities; children with various kinds of cognitive impairment; children with normal IQ's and hearing but who nevertheless fail to develop normal language (developmental aphasics); twins; and children who have suffered emotional and/or linguistic deprivation.)
4. Would totally rejecting B.F. Skinner's approach to language acquisition mean 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'?
5. What evidence is there that language acquisition involves much more than children simply adding to their knowledge of the linguistic system - it also involves them re-organizing and re-structuring that knowledge?
6. What contribution have cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies made to our understanding of the language acquisition process?
7. To what extent do you agree with Fred Genessee's claim that bilingual language development "may differ from monolingual development in superficial ways, but fundamentally they are the same."
Reference:
Genessee, F. (1993) 'Bilingual language development in pre-school children' in D. Bishop and K. Mogford (eds) *Language Development in Exceptional Circumstances*, Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum.
8. Discuss Marjorie Goodwin's claim that "Both girls and boys in our society have access to the same general language system, but detailed study of the talk they produce shows systematic differences in how the sexes put that common system to work."
Reference:
Goodwin, Marjorie Harness (1980) "Directive-Response Sequences in Girls' and Boys' Task Activities" in S. McConnell-Ginet, R. Borker, and N. Furman, eds., *Women and Language in Literature and Society*. NY: Praeger.
9. Discuss Willes' proposal that "learning to participate in classroom discourse constitutes a very considerable part of the learning most children do in the initial months of exposure of schooling."
Reference:
Willes, M. (1981) 'Learning to take part in classroom interaction' in P. French and M. Maclure (eds) *Adult-Child Conversations*, London: Croom Helm.
10. An important aspect of communicative competence is the ability to make and to interpret polite requests. Evaluate the notion that children under five already know a great deal about 'asking politely'.