

LITERATURE: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT/ DISSERTATION

Research Proposal to be submitted to the Moodle page by 1 November

Boxes will expand

Topic
English Language
Title
Is first language acquisition acquired through nature or nurture?
Aims & objectives
I am to highlight language acquisition and question how it is acquired. I will focus mainly on child language acquisition. There are strong arguments for both sides but I want to use this dissertation to argue that there is not one without the other. My argument is that without both nature (e.g natural elements like specific proteins which give us the ability to talk) and nurture (e.g talking to children so that they learn rules such as turn taking) language would not be acquired properly.
Key areas (c 500 words)
There are many interesting areas I can use for my analysis. For example, there are many theorists which have put forward different theories on language acquisition. Noam Chomsky claims that there is an innate ability in humans to learn language. He calls this the Language Acquisition device. A more scientific name for this device is the Forkhead box protein (Foxp2). This protein is required for humans to acquire proper development of language. There are registered cases where mutations of this gene caused individuals to suffer with severe speech and language disorders. Wilder Penfield was first to propose what is referred to as 'the critical period hypotheses'. This hypothesis suggested that there is a time period linked to age which humans must be exposed to language before in order to acquire it properly. This age is suggested to be sometime between 5 and puberty. This is proven by cases such as feral children. Stories such as that of Genie and Victor of Aveyron can be used as good examples. Genie was found at 13 years old after being bound to a seat in a locked room by her parents. Due to her isolation and her lack of socialisation she could not speak. After discovering Genie, numerous linguists and psychologists worked closely with her to try and teach her language. She was able to speak words but she never passed the two word stage. This resulted in her never being able to acquire correct grammar. From a behaviourist perspective, Genie should have been exposed to language spoken by adults to acquire language properly; this introduces imitation theory. Skinner's imitation theory suggests that children need to be exposed to the language of adults and they will learn by copying it. The adults would help the construction of the child's language by using positive or negative reinforcement. There are also cognitive developmental issues to take into consideration when discussing language acquisition. Briefly, this refers to different levels of abilities that a child has at different ages. Children are said to acquire language in specific stages which coincide with their cognitive abilities at the time. In order, these stages are babbling, one word stage, two word stage, telegraphic stage and the multiword stage. It is said that a child's understanding of language is acquired faster than their ability to speak it.

Introduction <i>Range: what else has been written on this subject, different perspectives</i> <i>Limits: what you will cover</i>
Behaviorist, Innatist and Interactionist
Methodology <i>Theoretical perspective; strategy for managing material</i>
Noam Chomsky, David Crystal, Jean Aitchison, Jean Piaget, Len Vygotsky, Wilder Penfield
Number & length of sections/chapters
8 chapters- roughly 1,250 words each
Timeline for completion – allow editing time
My current block ends on the 16 th of November. After this I have no lectures until March the 18 th . I am currently reading around the subject and plan to spend a lot of the first month reading and deciding what I am going to use. I plan to use these three months to do the majority (if not all) of my dissertation. I can use time around other blocks to edit if I have not finished this by the time my next block starts.
Bibliography
Language and Mind, Noam Chomsky Language and Response, Noam Chomsky The Essential Chomsky, Noam Chomsky On Language, Noam Chomsky Introduction to Language Pathology, David Crystal Child Language, David Crystal The Articulate Mammal: An introduction to Psycholinguistics, Jean Aitchison Linguistics, Jean Aitchison Introducing language and mind, Jean Aitchison The Psychology of The Child, The Psychology of Intelligence, Jean Piaget Thought and Language, Lev Vygotsky Mind in society, Lev Vygotsky Speech and brain-mechanisms, Wilder Penfield The Mystery of the Mind, Wilder Penfield
Supervisor (to be added later unless already arranged)