Analysis of essay introductions

Read the three essay introductions and identify where the authors *establish territory*, *establish niche*, and *occupy niche*. (The "prompt" for each essay is also shown.)

**ESSAY INTRODUCTION 1**

***Provide an overview of the theories related to both Age and Aptitude. Then provide a critical analysis of: Harley, B. and Hart, D. (1997) Language aptitude and second language proficiency in classroom learners of different starting ages. SSLA 19, 379-400***

**1. Introduction**

Among the individual differences that can influence achievement in learning a second language, **age** and **aptitude** have generally been cited among the most influential (e.g. Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Sawyer & Ranta, 2001). However, consensus regarding how those constructs are operationalized differs widely, especially in relation to age. In the present paper, the author will explore some research and views on aptitude and age as they pertain to second language acquisition (SLA), and provide a critical analysis of one specific and influential study (Harley & Hart, 1997) which examines both age and aptitude effects in L2 acquisition.

**ESSAY INTRODUCTION 2**

***Provide a critical analysis of the main vocabulary-related challenges faced by students learning to read in a second language.***

1. Introduction

The act of reading involves a number of cognitive processes, including those that are linguistic in nature (i.e. lower-level, bottom-up processes) and those that access the life experience of the learner (i.e. higher-level, top-down processes). Among the linguistic features, it is vocabulary that has been identified as an essential component of fluent reading (Alderson, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). However, herein lies one of the main challenges for L2 reading pedagogy: learners need vocabulary to develop into proficient readers, but the best way to develop one’s vocabulary is through reading. This is known as the “lexical paradox” (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). The purpose of this paper is to therefore explore some of the most challenging elements of both reading and vocabulary for learners of an L2, with the aim of arriving at an informed answer to the question of whether it is best to build one's vocabulary in order to read more extensively, or perhaps read more extensively in order to build one's vocabulary.

**ESSAY INTRODUCTION 3**

***The literature on input and interaction has failed to take account of the socio-cultural factors which might affect the acquisition of the second language. Discuss this statement in relation to theories and research evidence.***

**Introduction**

Much research has been conducted in the area of input and interaction and its bearing on second language acquisition (e.g. Gass & Madden, 1985; Chaudron, 1988; van Lier 1996). Nonetheless, that research, however valuable, has mostly described and experimented with input and interaction in the abstract, often under controlled conditions and with a focus on the cognitive processes involved in intake and uptake as a result of that input and interaction. Sociocultural factors which might influence language acquisition have largely not been accounted for in that research (Tarone, 2000; Firth & Wagner, 1997). Saville-Troike was one of the first authors to call this academic dearth into question:

(I)t is my position that we cannot fully understand, or even satisfactorily study, second language acquisition unless we see it as part of a larger whole – the acquisition of a second culture. We must begin to escape the inherited tyranny of a focus on linguistic form ... if we are ever to achieve a truly holistic perspective on the process by which children acquire a second language. (Saville-Troike, 1985:58)

Irrespective of the validity the above observation, one criticism of sociocultural approaches to research has been their perceived lack of relevance to the ‘A’ in SLA (Kasper, 1997). In other words, the question has been raised regarding the extent to which society and culture actually influence L2 acquisition. Therefore, in the present paper the author will focus especially on research and other evidence that directly or indirectly shows that sociocultural factors do affect the acquisition of a second language, and that research in input and interaction needs to therefore take better account of those factors.