

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
FACULTY OF ARTS



JUNE 2010 SESSION EXAMINATIONS

LIN3004 Synoptic Study-Unit: Interdisciplinary Issues in Linguistics
for

B.A.

Tuesday 8th June 2010

09.15 ~ 12:15

Answer any 3 (three) questions.

1. Show how, to a greater or lesser extent, language contact within Maltese society comes about from factors which have remained more or less constant throughout our history.
2. It is possible for an individual to possess more than one language or language variety. Discuss all the possible individual linguistic profiles involving Maltese and English that can occur within contemporary society in Malta, bringing out where possible the relevant sociolinguistic variables.
3. Linguistics has a major contribution to make to language education. Explain why you would agree or disagree with this statement.
4. Describe the developments in language teaching methodology starting with the grammar-translation method up to the communicative approach. Highlight the ways in which language education matured by drawing upon developments in theoretical linguistics.
5. Discuss the role of meaningful input in the child's development of language and ways in which the child can be considered a protagonist in the processing of such input.
6. Slobin and various other psycholinguists have made various attempts to explain why children are able to use language at an age when they are unable to perform cognitively complex tasks that may be simpler than resolving the complex structures of different languages. Can you throw some light on how the young child can actually acquire complex language?
7. Explain what it is that the child needs to learn in order to become a member of the language community into which s/he is born. Discuss what else must be

accounted for when the child is born into a family that uses more than one language on an everyday basis.

8. Compare and contrast what is involved in the acquisition of a sign language as a first language to what is involved in the acquisition of a spoken language as a first language.
9. Would you agree that sign languages can be compared to spoken languages at all linguistic levels? Discuss in view of the linguistic characteristics of both sign and spoken languages. Highlight the differences between the two.
10. “The notions of balance and representativeness in corpus design are no longer relevant, now that the World Wide Web provides a practically infinite linguistic resource.” Do you agree with this view?
11. Since corpora are samples of spoken or written Natural Language, they have a limited size and, moreover, focus on linguistic performance, not competence. In your view, does this limit the linguist’s ability to make interesting generalisations about language on the basis of corpus data?
12. What makes Natural Language Processing difficult is the fact that ambiguity is pervasive in language at all levels of analysis. Do you agree? Support your argument with concrete examples of problems of ambiguity in different NLP tasks.
13. Describe the Chomsky hierarchy of grammars and discuss its relevance to natural language research.
14. Language typology and language universals are two sides of the same coin. Discuss with examples.
15. Word/constituent order is a very dominant parameter in the study of language typology. Discuss with particular reference to Greenberg’s and Siewierska’s studies of word order.
16. By making use of an idealized model of the vocal tract it is possible to predict how different vocal shapes and actions contribute to the acoustic signal. Outline the basics of the model sometimes referred to as the *source-filter model of speech production* and show how the model serves to distinguish between different classes of sounds.
17. Consider the usefulness of acoustic phonetics as an analytical tool for the speech sciences, particularly given the highly variable nature of speech, both intra-speaker and across different speakers, speech contexts and speaking situations.
18. “Interlanguage constitutes an unstable system and as such is permeable to invasion by new linguistic forms. Its dynamic quality is reflected in tremendous variability in language-learner language and also in overlapping

stages of development as one set of variable rules is revised in favour of another” (Ellis 1985). Discuss, illustrating by means of appropriate examples.

19. Discuss the role in the formation of different interlanguage phonologies of non-linguistic factors such as individual differences between speakers, affective factors such as motivation, cognitive factors and age. Illustrate by means of examples wherever possible.