
UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

Second Semester Examination
Academic Session 2007/2008

April 2008

HET 521 - PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

Duration : 3 hours

Please check that this examination paper consists of FOUR pages of printed material before you begin the examination.

Answer FOUR questions. Answer TWO questions from Section A and TWO questions from Section B.

Section A

Answer any TWO questions.

1. Chomsky's theory of LAD/UG applies to L1 acquisition as well as L2 learning. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

[25 marks]

2. Should theories of SLA account for Interlanguage variability? Discuss.

[25 marks]

3. Discuss how the two psycholinguistic theories of sentence processing account for the way speakers parse garden path sentences such as *The horse ran past the barn fell*. Include in your answer a clear explanation of the theories as well as relevant examples.

[25 marks]

4. In the normal human brain, both hemispheres are involved, perhaps to differing degrees, in language function. Yet there is also evidence to suggest that such bihemispheric involvement may not be necessary for reasonably normal functioning. Discuss the evidence from experimental studies that led to this conclusion.

[25 marks]

Section B

Answer any TWO questions.

5. William Labov conducted a dialectology study to observe social differences between speakers in Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts in the north-eastern United States in 1961. In his study, Labov realized that his survey of Martha's Vineyard provided a snapshot of one point in ongoing change. In this study, a combination of the descriptive, linguistic facts about older and younger speakers, and an appreciation of the social changes taking place in the Vineyard, simulated a picture of how social and linguistic changes work their way through a community with the passage of time. Prior to this study, linguists had believed that language change could only be studied once it had happened.

(Meyerhoff, 2006)

Discuss how Labov's methods established that there is a robust connection between the variation found in any community of speakers at a given point in time and the long term processes of change studied by historical linguists.

[25 marks]

6. Studies on language and gender reveal that 'women's language' has the following features: First, female speakers interrupt less than males in mixed-sex conversations. Second, female speakers use more indirect speech than males. Third, female speakers use more conversational support such as 'minimal responses' than males. Fourth, female speakers use features which indicate tentativeness, such as tag questions, hedges, and other expressions that make them sound hesitant or uncertain. These findings have given rise to the idea that women speak in a cooperative way or a polite way, whereas men speak in a competitive way.

(Lakoff, 1975)

Discuss whether all women stereotypically speak this way. Does a distinct 'women's language' really exist?

[25 marks]

7. "A shrinking language minority cannot be saved by the actions of well-wishers who do not belong to the minority in question. In particular, its shrinking cannot be halted by the action, however benevolent and intelligent, of a modern centralized state. It can be saved only by itself: and then only if its members acquire the will to stop its shrinking, acquire the institutions and financial means to take appropriate measures, and take them."

(Fennel, 1980)

The above quote is about the depressing failure of the Republic of Ireland's attempts to revive the Gaelic language. Discuss how Fennel's statement can be used as a lesson in revitalizing a language of a minority group and suggest how Fishman's proposal in language planning can be applied in reversing the shift of Gaelic in Ireland.

[25 marks]