

**Linguistics paper for  
Applicants to the MPhil/PhD programme of  
the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, CUHK**

**Instructions to candidates**

Answer any three of the following questions. You are expected to be coherent, succinct and logical in writing your answers.

You are allowed three hours for this paper. You should stop writing when you have reached the time limit.

You must answer the questions in English. Examples of words and sentences from Chinese (Cantonese or Mandarin) may be written in Chinese characters or romanizations. For IPA symbols, please use the SIL IPA93 font set (attached with the paper, which you need to install on your computer if it is not already installed), or the modified version of it due to Professor Pan Wuyun.

You should work on this test paper alone without any help from others. Please write down the exact time when you begin to read the questions. You should sign the statement at this end of this page before submitting your answers.

Name of candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Application number: \_\_\_\_\_

Time when you begin to read the questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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I, the undersigned, declare that I have answered the questions in this paper solely by myself, without consulting any other person, and without help from any other persons, within the three-hour time limit allotted.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The following two excerpts, from Chao Yuen-Ren and Noam Chomsky respectively, reflect contrasting views of language.

(i) "Language is a set of habits...Language is a convention, a tradition, a social institution, that has grown through the common living of a large number of people who carry on the tradition.....Language is learned, not inborn; it is handed on, not inherited."

-Chao Yuen-Ren (1966) *Language and Symbolic Systems*.

(ii) "To know a language, I am assuming, is to be in a certain mental state, which persists as a relatively steady component of transitory mental states. ...I assume further that to be in such a mental state is to have a certain mental structure consisting of a system of rules and principles that generate and relate mental representations of various types."

-Noam Chomsky (1980) *Rules and Representations*.

"Acquisition of language is something that happens to you; it's not something that you do. ..You don't learn to do it..you are just designed to do it at a certain time".

-Noam Chomsky (1988) *Language and Problems of Knowledge*.

(a) Discuss how the excerpts in (i) and (ii) reflect different views of language and linguistic competence.

(b) To what extent are these conceptions of language and linguistic competence applicable to other systems of communication such as creoles and sign languages?

2) (a) Analyze the ambiguity exhibited in the English and Chinese sentences below.

(i) Peter has no idea how he's going to explain what happened to Hunter.

(ii) Mary did not leave her husband because he loved her.

(iii) Tamen xihuan jiao changge de tongxue 他們喜歡教唱歌的同學。

They like teach sing NOM student

(iv) Jueshiyue Laowang ye shi zhuanjia 爵士樂老王也是專家。

Jazz Laowang also be expert

For each of the above sentences, describe the interpretations of the sentence that are available to you.

If the ambiguity of a sentence can be resolved structurally, please give the relevant structural representations of the various interpretations of the sentence. If not, please

discuss the source of the ambiguity underlying the sentence.

(3) (a) Examine the data on plural formation in English in (a) the data on past tense formation in English in (b):

(i)	pit	pits	lid	lids	dish	dishes
	cup	cups	cab	cabs	watch	watches
	lake	lakes	pig	pigs	bus	buses
	laugh	laughs	farm	farms	ash	ashes
			bee	bees	judge	judges
			dove	doves	buzz	buzzes

(ii)	want	wanted	guard	guarded
	lisp	lisped	rub	rubbed
	pick	picked	hug	hugged
	kiss	kissed	love	loved
	watch	watched	judge	judged
	wash	washed	sigh	sighed
	cough	coughed	clone	cloned

Give the phonetic forms of each of the forms in (i). Discuss the phonological regularity involved in English plural formation. If possible, state the regularity in the form of a phonological rule.

Give the phonetic forms of each of the forms in (ii). Discuss the phonological regularity involved in English past tense formation. If possible, state the regularity in the form of a phonological rule.

Discuss any similarities and differences that you find between the two phonological regularities revealed in the data in (i) and (ii).

(b) Examine the distribution of un-rounded vowels in Cantonese as shown in the rime table. In Table 1, the first column indicates the possibility of vowels occurring in open syllables; the other columns indicate the possibilities of vowels occurring with various codas. Each rime is illustrated by a Cantonese morpheme indicated by a Chinese character.

On the basis of the information given, how would you analyze the un-rounded vowels of Cantonese as part of a phonological system? Define the primitives used in your theory and elaborate on the assumptions of the phonological theory that you adopt.

Table 1. Rimes involving un-rounded vowels in Cantonese

	-m	-n	-ŋ	-p	-t	-k
i:	i:m 知 兼	i:n 堅		i:p 劫	i:t 潔	
ɪ*			ɪŋ 京			ɪk 激
ɛ:			ɛ:ŋ 靚			ɛ:k 吃
a:	a:m 沙 衫	a:n 山	a:ŋ 盲	a:p 坡	a:t 殺	a:k 索
ɐ*	ɐm 心	ɐn 新	ɐŋ 盟	ɐp 十	ɐt 室	ɐk 塞

Rimes with \* are those that cannot occur in open syllables.

4. Examine the conversational exchange below between an English-speaking boy aged 2 years 7 months and his mother and other adults. The text is a slightly edited version of a true record of adult-child interaction. The following conventions are used in the transcript: CHI=child; MOT=mother, RIC=Richard, another adult present; '#' marks a pause; 'xxx' marks parts that are not clear; the forms enclosed by parentheses '(') indicate those that were not pronounced by the child.

- \*CHI: beetle beetle beetle.
- \*MOT: we don't want all these beetles.
- \*CHI: ok?
- \*MOT: ok.
- \*CHI: xxx big one # beetle.
- \*MOT: oh # that's a big one.
- \*CHI: big one.
- \*CHI: beetle.
- \*CHI: what xxx drawing?
- \*CHI: what you drawing?
- \*MOT: a beetle can you tell Urs(u)la where you went yesterday?
- \*CHI: went grocery store.
- \*MOT: we didn't go to the grocery store.
- \*MOT: where did we go?
- \*CHI: go car.
- \*MOT: yes # we went in the car.
- \*CHI: went a car.
- \*MOT: and what did you see?
- \*CHI: animal.

\*MOT: animals.  
\*CHI: what else?  
\*CHI: big doggie # eating.  
\*MOT: a big doggie eating?  
\*CHI: big dog eating.  
\*MOT: but he was much bigger than Perro.  
\*CHI: big a Perro.  
\*MOT: do you remember what the place was called?  
\*CHI: call animal.  
\*MOT: no # zoo.  
\*CHI: zoo?  
\*CHI: parrot.  
\*MOT: yeah # we saw the parrot.  
\*CHI: saggy baggy.  
\*MOT: you didn't see an elephant.  
\*CHI: parrot.  
\*CHI: what else?  
\*MOT: what else did you see?  
\*CHI: lamb.  
\*MOT: a lamb?  
\*CHI: baa baa baa.  
\*MOT: is that what it says?  
\*CHI: yeah.  
\*CHI: doggie doggie doggie.  
\*CHI: big a doggie.  
\*MOT: big dog.  
\*CHI: big doggie eat big doggie eat.  
\*MOT: yeah # big doggie was eating.  
\*MOT: oh # broke a pencil.  
\*CHI: (a)nother one.  
\*MOT: you musn't play with a pencil in your hand.  
\*CHI: Cromer.  
\*CHI: what dat is dat # Cromer?  
\*RIC: what is what?  
\*CHI: right dere.  
\*CHI: other foot.  
\*RIC: oh # those are shoes.  
\*CHI: cowboy.  
\*CHI: cowboy xxx lots of boot.  
\*MOT: lots of boots?  
\*CHI: yeah.  
\*MOT: oh # no # what will he write with?  
\*CHI: big needle.  
\*MOT: big what?

\*CHI: big needle.  
\*MOT: a big needle.  
\*CHI: (a)nother needle # needle.  
\*MOT: oh # another needle.  
\*CHI: big needle.  
\*CHI: what is?  
\*MOT: I don't know # what is it?  
\*CHI: Cromer pencil.  
\*MOT: oh # Cromer-'s pencil.  
\*CHI: sun # Mommy.  
\*CHI: sky # Mommy.  
\*MOT: oh # is that the sky?  
\*CHI: yeah.  
\*CHI: what dat?  
\*MOT: I don't know.  
\*MOT: what is it?  
\*CHI: Hump(t)y Dump(t)y.  
\*MOT: is that Humpty Dumpty?  
\*CHI: xxx face.  
\*MOT: who spanked Humpty Dumpty-'s face?  
\*CHI: where Hump(t)y Dump(t)y go?  
\*MOT: I don't know.  
\*CHI: where go?  
\*MOT: oh # he's under your finger.  
\*RIC: where is he?  
\*CHI: building.  
\*MOT: write on the other side # honey.  
\*CHI: I need a chair.  
\*MOT: you need a chair.  
\*CHI: sit on it.  
\*CHI: I sit on it.  
\*CHI: Hump(t)y Dump(t)y (a)gain.  
\*CHI: there Hump(t)y Dump(t)y.  
\*CHI: see little Hump(t)y Dump(t)y see.  
\*MOT: Humpty Dumpty what?  
\*CHI: see.  
\*MOT: see?  
\*CHI: yeah.  
\*MOT: careful.  
\*CHI: see?  
\*CHI: wha(t) happen Hump(t)y Dump(t)y?  
\*CHI: where Hump(t)y Dump(t)y go?  
\*MOT: I don't know.  
\*MOT: where is he?

\*CHI: down on it.  
\*MOT: down where?  
\*CHI: down # dere Hump(t)y Dump(t)y.  
\*MOT: there's Humpty Dumpty?  
\*CHI: yeah.

(a) On the basis of the data above, would you say that the main mechanisms for language acquisition are imitation and reinforcement? If not, why not?

(b) Analyze the structure of the nominals used by the child at this stage of his development.

(c) Analyze the structure of the clauses used by the child at this stage of his development.

(d) On the basis of your answers to (b) and (c), comment on similarities and differences between the grammar of the child at this stage of his development and the grammar of an English adult. What might account for these similarities and differences?

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