

I. Language Acquisition: (**Answer BOTH questions**). (Suggested time: 20 min each=40 min)

1. What do we know about the process of first language acquisition and where does bilingualism fit in? Include some of the theories and misconceptions of bilingualism. (20 pts)

First language acquisition is thought to actually begin in the womb, when the mother is around seven months pregnant. At this age, the infant can begin to hear the world around it and begins picking up on the particular intonation of that language. At birth, babies are equally sensitive to the phonetic differences of their language to the phonetic differences of any other languages. They are hardwired to be able to learn any language that is thrown at them. However, by the age of two months, they are only able to discriminate between the sounds in their mother tongue, and not any other language. They eventually begin to prefer the sounds of human speech to any other sound, and the sounds of their mother's speech to any other speech. After around a year or so, babies begin to babble. This is practice for beginning to speak their language. Even deaf babies babble by making repeated signs in front of them. In babbling, they repeatedly make the sounds of their language. A few months later, they enter the holophrastic stage, or the one-word stage. They are able to make one-word utterances, though they often contain entire sentences' worth of meaning. For example, "more" would mean that the child would like more of that particular food to be served to them. At around two years, they enter the two-word stage, where they are able to string two words together, and are often sensitive to word order. For example, they would say "Mommy push" and not "push Mommy" to mean that their mother is pushing a toy across the floor. After this, they begin rapidly picking up new words, primarily nouns. They learn a few words a day. Interestingly, children ages seven to ten tend to learn many more words a day, around seven or eight. Before the age of seven is regarded to be the critical period. This is the theory that after this age, children will never fully be able to develop a first language if they have not already. By the age of ten, children are thought to have fully mastered their first language. Childhood bilingualism is another interesting part of language development to examine, as children are able to fully master two languages in this time. The separate systems hypothesis is the most widely believed regarding childhood bilingualism. This is the idea that children develop two separate sets of vocabulary, grammar rules, and language systems without mixing them or being confused by them. This is propagated by the evidence that children know to speak different languages to different listeners. It is thought that having one parent speaking one language and another parent speaking another is the most effective method of teaching a child to be bilingual, as they are able to keep the languages more separate. The other theory of childhood bilingualism involves codeswitching, and is the notion that children combine their sets of language and vernacular and switch between them, much as adult speakers do. Bilingualism has often been thought to be confusing for children, though this has

mainly been an excuse to make English more dominant in the education system and to discriminate against heritage languages. Though bilingual children were often thought to be handicapped by their ability, it is now known that bilingual children perform better on language tests and tend to perform better generally in school.

2. Comment on what is known about the effect of such factors as age, intelligence, and motivation on second language acquisition. (20 pts)

Second language acquisition is a process that almost everyone at least attempts in their lives. The most powerful factor in second language acquisition is certainly age. Past the age of seven or so (past the critical period), the ability for the brain to learn a second language gradually decreases until age 18, where it levels out. Learning a second language is far easier the younger you are, as your brain is plastic enough to be able to do so. The more young exposure to a language, the better chances the person has of being able to learn that language. Intelligence is also a factor. It seems that people with higher intelligence have an easier time learning a second language. However, it is difficult to form a solid conclusion on this because of the bias in IQ testing, the standard for intelligence testing. Motivation is also an important factor in second language acquisition. People who are highly motivated to learn another language, be it for work or personal pleasure, have a much easier time learning this language. An example of this would be military learning programs, in which soldiers are very rapidly taught the basics of another language, often the one used where they are being sent into combat. Because these soldiers are highly motivated to learn this language, it is easier for them. How the second language is perceived is also a factor. This is to say, languages that have low covert or overt prestige in the area are often harder for people to learn because of the associations they have with that language. Because they see that language as inferior, they do not want to learn it. How the language is handled in the classroom is also important. Though people want to have their errors corrected, constant correction can be discouraging for many. Modified input (repeating back the student's sentence in conversation, but with the error corrected) can go straight over students' heads. It seems the most effective method of learning a second language in the classroom is content-based learning in another language, in which students are learning about something else (perhaps the culture and/or history of the country(s) where the language is spoken) while simultaneously using the target language. All of these factors can have a large effect on one's success in or ability to learn a second language.

II. Sociolinguistics: (15 pts, Suggested time: 15 min)

What are the fundamental differences in the approaches of Sociolinguists like William Labov and Universal Grammarians such as Chomsky?

Sociolinguists like Labov see the impact of social factors, such as wealth, race, class, gender, age, etc. on language use, while Universal Grammarians like Chomsky are much more inclined to believe that people have a more fixed form of language use. Labov studied the effect of class on language by examining the speech patterns of clerks at three different department stores in New York: one upper class, one middle class, and one lower class. The upper class

store clerks spoke with a more standard variety because of their perceived audience. The middle class store clerks spoke with a more nonstandard variety, while the lower class clerks spoke with the most accent or nonstandard variety. Labov saw the impact of social context on speech and how people change their speech to adapt to their perceived audience. However, Universal Grammarians like Chomsky believe that people's plasticity in their language use (i.e. How much they are able to adapt their language use) decreases over time. This is perpetuated by his critical age theory, the idea that after around seven years of age, people are sort of stuck to the form of language that they have learned. Chomsky tends not to look at social factors and the differences between them the way that Labov does, but rather sees the idea that people have great commonalities in their language use due to the notion of Universal Grammar, or the idea that all languages share an underlying structure. While Sociolinguists look at social factors and contexts and differences in variants of a language, Universal Grammarians look primarily at development and similarities between languages.

III. Language variation: (15 pts, Suggested time: 15 min)

What are some common misconceptions/problems with the notion of "Standard English"?

Standard English is widely a social construction, though it may be defined as the dialect with the most covert prestige, that is to say, mostly widely recognized by a country. For each English-speaking country, there is a form of Standard English. However, this notion carries a wide variety of issues and misconceptions associated with it. For example, many people assume that Standard English is the only form of "correct" English, and that whatever other dialects are spoken are representative of people who are less educated. Though no one truly speaks Standard English, and it is only really a written form, people often do not realize that everyone speaks a variant of English. This results in discrimination against people who do not speak what is perceived to be Standard English. An example of this may be someone that sounds like a certain race (i.e. Not Standard English) over the phone, and is subsequently denied housing based on race. Many people also believe that Southern speech is uneducated or "redneck," even Southerners themselves. These stereotypes and misconceptions that Standard English is the only correct form of English ignore the history and development of the language, as well as the value of the variants that are spoken all over the United States and elsewhere. English has not always sounded the way that Standard English is defined today, and the Standard varies from country to country. Therefore, to ascribe a particular dialect as Standard English erases the rich culture of other regions and dialects of English.

IV. Language variation: (**Choose ONE of the following**). (20 pts, Suggested time: 20 min)

2. Comment on the issues of language prejudice and language subordination in our country and give specific examples.

Language prejudice is a form of discrimination in this country that continues to be far more pervasive than other types of discrimination, and yet is often highly ignored and brushed aside. Many forms of English, such as Chicano English, African American Vernacular English, and various forms of English spoken by non-native speakers are often perceived much differently than any forms of “White” English. Language prejudice can largely be unconscious. When people hear the speech of others, they subconsciously draw conclusions based on that person, often associated with the race that they are perceived to be. An example of this would be the study done on college students in which the students were shown two different pictures of the perceived speaker, one white and one Asian-American, and then listened to a recording of a lecture by a woman speaking in a Midwestern dialect. The students who had seen the picture of the Asian-American woman as the speaker were much more likely to note an accent, that of course, could not have existed. Furthermore, these students performed worse on a follow-up comprehension test on the content of the lecture. This suggests that language prejudice is pervasive enough to completely alter the understanding and perceptions that the students had on this particular content. We are often unaware of such notions. \*Alim and Smitherman, in their book *Articulate While Black*, labeled the issue of language prejudice and language subordination as “Racism 2.0.” Racism 2.0 is the next generation of racism, in which people do not discriminate outright and openly as they once did, but instead discriminate against people of Color based on their language use, and therefore, the perceived stereotypes about them. However, these variants of English associated with different races are often rooted in history and carry with them and identity and a community. For African Americans, this is slavery; AAVE has influences of African languages as well as Southern speech, for example. In schools, such varieties are often suppressed and erased, as they are widely considered “incorrect” and not academic enough. The issues of language prejudice in this country often go unrecognized, and yet, they constitute the lingering forms of racial discrimination.

\*I read this book for Linguistics 245.

V. Discourse Analysis: (10 pts, Suggested time: 15 min.)

1. Consider the following utterance:

**“Is there any more coffee?”**

a. Describe the locutionary act and the possible illocutionary acts (more than one) involved.

The locutionary act here is a yes or no question: the speaker would seem to be asking whether more coffee is present or not. Here there are a few illocutionary acts. They are all directives, as this is a question that, no matter the result, is an attempt to get the

speaker to do something. One illocutionary act would be someone drinking coffee who is requesting more from the listener, and asking them to serve it, whether that means to pour it or to make more. Another would be asking a store clerk whether there is any more coffee in the stock room, as the shelves are empty. This would then prompt the clerk to go and get more from the stock room. Also in a store, it may be a request for a listener to help look for the coffee, as the speaker cannot find it. It may also be an attempt to get a yes or no answer, for example, in a situation where the speaker and the listener are hosting guests and the speaker is asking whether there is more coffee to be served. There are certainly more illocutionary acts, but these are the main ones.

b. Identify the utterance as a direct or indirect speech act and explain your reasoning.

This utterance is an indirect speech act. The speaker is most likely not asking for a yes or no answer, but rather, is an attempt to get the listener to pour the speaker some coffee or to request that the listener make more. However, in certain contexts, this could be a direct speech act. For example, if the speaker is attempting to serve coffee to guests and asks the listener, perhaps another host, whether there is more coffee that could be served, this would be a direct speech act.

**PLEDGE!!!** "I pledge my honor that I have neither given nor received assistance, and that I have seen no dishonest work"

Signed: Helen M. White

\_\_\_\_\_ I have intentionally not signed the pledge.