

國 立 清 華 大 學 命 題 紙

97學年度 語言學研究所 系(所) 組碩士班入學考試

科目 國文與英文 科目代碼 3903 共 3 頁第 1 頁 *請在【答案卷卡】內作答

國文(50分)

請說明：你希望語言學研究，能夠解決或說明你所感興趣的，有關人類心智或人類社會文化的什麼問題？

I. Summary and Comment (20%): Read the following passage and write a summary of 150 words and a comment of another 150 words (both in English). You should find the main ideas of the text and express them in your own words. Do not quote portions of the original text. Indicate the number of words at the end of your summary and comment.

For a number of philosophers, the study of language is a branch of mathematics rather than an aspect of psychology. Languages are taken to be Platonic objects existing independently of the humans who speak them, and possessing mathematical properties which could not be expressed if attention were limited to the subparts of such languages accessible to human mental structure. For the study of artificial languages such as the predicate calculus, this is a viable assumption; it is less plausible when applied to natural, humanly spoken, languages. A classic statement of the position is provided by Montague, who opens one of his most famous papers with the categorical statement: "I reject the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages." Unfortunately, in the absence of a criterion for measuring important theoretical differences, this claim is meaningless. Montague was aiming to develop a theory of truth, and it is rather obvious that he seriously underestimated the complexity of the syntax of natural language, and misconstrued the aims of the generative grammarians whom he criticized. The demand that they, or anyone, provide a "rigorous definition, complete in all details... of some reasonably rich fragment of English" is a bizarre goal to set oneself in the natural sciences, as can be seen by replacing "English" with "biology" or "chemistry." Moreover, the linguist's preoccupation with explanation rather than description, allied with the fact that natural languages are replete with idiosyncratic irregularities, means that it is not a goal that most of those interested in I-language would even set themselves. As we saw earlier, complete coverage is neither attainable nor even desirable. More recently, Katz has repeatedly claimed that language is an abstract object in Plato's sense, and that failing to take account of the mathematical properties of languages leads to a failure to capture significant linguistic generalizations and, more seriously, to the incoherence of the philosophical underpinnings of Chomsky's paradigm.

Before evaluating this claim, we need to distinguish it from a separate issue concerning the axiomatization or logical formalization of the linguistic analyses provided by working linguists. For Chomsky the interest and importance of analyses of language reside in the implications they have for philosophical and psychological issues. This is clearly not incompatible with a mathematical axiomatization of those analyses. Indeed, Chomsky's early work was renowned for its mathematical rigor and he made some contribution to the nascent discipline of mathematical linguistics, in particular the analysis of (formal) languages in terms of what is now known as the "Chomsky hierarchy." But formal languages share few properties with natural language, and results of any empirical interest were minimal. In recent years, the emphasis on formalization has been considerably reduced, leading some to

suggest that generative theory has become woolly and untestable. Chomsky's common-sense response is to say that he does "not see any point in formalizing for the sake of formalizing. You can always do that." The answer is cogent, provided that the unformalized analyses and principles are sufficiently explicit to make it possible to test the predictions they generate. This is itself not always straightforward, as principles of any degree of complexity and deductive depth are likely to be interpretable in a range of different ways, depending on co-varying assumptions. In the current state of knowledge, formalization is often unrewarding, as formal systems which are complete and consistent are too impoverished adequately to express the generalizations made, and require the making of arbitrary decisions about matters that are not properly understood. Formalization is like careful experimentation: it is to be undertaken when there is a specific purpose in view, or a particular hypothesis to test; it is not done for its own sake.

II. Composition (30%): Write a composition of about 300 words on the following topic.

My ideas of a good linguist