

國立清華大學 命題紙

九十二學年度 語言學研究所 系(所) _____ 組碩士班研究生招生考試

科目 國文與英文 科號 4503 共 3 頁第 1 頁 *請在試卷【答案卷】內作答

I. 國文

作文 (50%)

人類的語言可說是奧妙無窮。舉例來說，我們可以用語言架構出過程合理，但結論荒謬的邏輯論證。譬如，古代希臘哲學家 Zeno of Elea (490-425 BC) 提出了以下的「悖論」(paradox)，稱為「二分法悖論」(*The Dichotomy*)。該悖論之推論如下。假設我們要從某地點 A 走到另一地點 B。A 到 B 之間的距離是 100 公尺。要走 100 公尺的距離，我們得先走 50 公尺；而要走 50 公尺的距離，我們得先走 25 公尺；要走 25 公尺的距離，我們得先走 12.5 公尺；要走 12.5 公尺的距離，我們得先走 6.25 公尺；要走 6.25 公尺的距離，我們得先走 3.125 公尺...如此持續下去，因為任何一個實數都可以除以 2 而得到另一個實數，運算過程無窮無盡，結果我們永遠走不出第一步！這項悖論推論過程看似合理，但結果卻與我們的經驗事實不符，在歷史上使許多哲學家 and 邏輯學家傷透了腦筋。

然而隨著現代語言學理論的發展，我們發現諸如「二分法悖論」之類的邏輯悖論，事實上讓我們有機會更清楚了解人類自然語言中某些非常基本的性質。請從語言的「無限性」(infiniteness) 和「指涉性」(referentiality) 兩個角度，討論「二分法悖論」中所顯露的人類自然語言的本質。請盡量避免抒情式的發揮；討論越精確越佳。如有需要，請提出具體證據支持你的看法。

II. 英文

(A) Reading and summarization (20%)

Please read the following article and write a summary in English with less than 80 words.

The world's 6,000 or so languages have a very uneven geographic distribution. At the one extreme, Europe, with an area of about 10,000,000 km², has only about 63 native languages, falling into only three stocks (51 Indo-European languages, 11 Uralic and the isolate Basque). At the opposite extreme, New Guinea, with less than one-tenth of Europe's area, has about 1,000 languages — yes, 1,000 mutually unintelligible languages, not mere dialects — falling into at least 60 stocks. Most languages fall into some family of related languages. The existence of a language family implies that its modern languages diverged from some shared ancient ancestral language, as documented for the divergence of the modern Romance languages (constituting a branch of the Indo-European family) from Latin over the past 2,000 years. By using such measurable rates of divergence to calibrate the 'time depths' of the main language families, one estimates that each of them has accumulated language divergence over about the past 3,000-10,000 years. (continuing)

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(continued)

Remarkably, that implies that the vast majority of existing Old World (Eurasian plus African) languages are descended from a mere 16 or so languages that existed 10,000 years ago. Surely, in the early Holocene the Old World actually supported far more languages than 16 — there must have been tens of thousands of them, if modern New Guinea or Native American California can be taken as models. Most of those ancient Old World languages must have disappeared within the past 10,000 years, leaving as evidence of their former existence only a few isolated languages that barely survived into modern times. In western Europe, only Basque and the now-extinct Etruscan and possibly Minoan (Linear A) languages attest to the linguistic diversity erased by the sweep of the Indo-European steamroller over Europe. What enabled speakers of those 16 ancestral languages to supplant their tens of thousands of brethren?

Bellwood and Renfrew attribute the steamrollers to the very local origins of agriculture around the world. At most only nine circumscribed areas, perhaps as few as five, supported a sufficient diversity of domesticable wild plant and animal species to permit food production to arise independently, beginning about 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent of southwest Asia. Because even ancient food production yielded 10-100 times the human population densities that could be supported by the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, farmers spread from those few homelands to interbreed with, dominate or replace the hunter-gatherers, and thereby carry their domesticated animals, languages and genes over most other areas suitable for agriculture. By erasing the products of previous tens of thousands of years of language evolution, the Holocene agricultural expansions reset the linguistic clock in much of the world. Only a few regions, such as New Guinea and Native California, remained unaffected.

(B) Writing (30%)

Saving endangered languages has become an important issue to many linguists. Recently, however, debates arise as to whether it is really feasible to get serious engagement in such a business. For one thing, it is clear that in many cases the extinction of minority languages did not result from suppression or political enforcement. In those cases, the minority people give up their own native tongues in order to get survival in the mainstream society, where the culturally dominant language is spoken. Also, it is indeed questionable if any effort that aims at restoring a minority language back to a critical amount of population for survival could be successful at all — individual efforts are doomed to fail in the face of the overwhelming economic-cultural changes of the society. One could argue, for example, that it would be more beneficial to the minority people if the funds go directly to them rather to their languages. Since the languages will be extinct anyway, why waste the money? *(continuing)*

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(continued)

As a prospect linguist, you are obligated to express your own opinion in this debate. Please write a short essay and comment on this debate. Make your position clear and, if necessary, cite evidence to support your argument. Avoid vague terms of humanitarianism and philanthropy – they don't help much when you are trying to convince people that saving endangered languages does (or does not) deserve tax payers' money. Restrict your essay to no more than 400 words.