

## Study Guide for the M.A. in Spanish Linguistics

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The linguistics portion of the M.A. exam in Spanish linguistics covers four general areas of study that reflect the material presented in the linguistics courses taught at RGRLL. These areas include: I. Synchronic Spanish linguistics (Span. 423/526, 426/526, 427/527), II. Second language acquisition (Span. 424/524), III. Spanish as a world language (Span 427/527, 490/590), and IV. Romance linguistics/Historical linguistics (Span. 420/520, 428/528). Students taking the linguistics portion of the M.A. exam must be prepared to answer a total of three questions from three of these four areas.

The following is a comprehensive list of questions that may appear in the linguistics portion of the M.A. exam in Spanish. In preparing for this exam, you should answer all of the questions from three of the areas. Be sure to make specific reference to the material covered in the corresponding linguistics courses and to include plenty of relevant examples and supporting data or studies whenever needed. Your exam grade will be based on the completeness and accuracy of your answers, as well on your ability to cite research in support of your answers and identify outstanding issues.

The textbooks and materials used in the linguistics courses in our department constitute a first stop for basic information. Other key sources of information are listed at the end of this handout.

If you have any questions, please contact Prof. Maria Carreira at [Carreira@csulb.edu](mailto:Carreira@csulb.edu).

### I. **Synchronic linguistics** (Spanish 423,523 426)/526

- A. Provide a detailed comparison of the phonological properties and distribution of each of the following elements as they exist in English and Spanish:
  - 1. the vowel system
  - 2. {b, d, g}
  - 3. {p, t, k}
  - 4. {l}
  - 5. {r, r}
  - 7. intonation at the sentence level
  
- B. Provide a detailed comparison of the distributional properties and usage of the following syntactic elements as they exist in English and Spanish.
  - 1. the gerund
  - 2. the infinitive
  - 3. plural formation
  
- C. Provide a detailed explanation of the main issues concerning the distribution and usage of the following units of Spanish grammar:
  - 1. the two copulas (ser and estar)
  - 2. the subjunctive (in noun, adjectival, and adverbial clauses)

3. the preterit v. the imperfect
  4. spirantization
  5. gender
  6. case in the pronominal system
  7. the personal “a”
- D. Define each of the following terms and provide representative examples:
- assimilation, aspiration, elision of /s/, velarization, point of articulation, mode of articulation, sonority, verbal aspect, verbal mode, verbal tense, derivational and inflectional morphemes, main/subordinate clause.
- E. Compare and contrast the grammatical properties of the reflexive, reciprocal and indirect object “se.”
- F. English and Spanish both have an epenthetic vowel. Discuss the form and functions of these vowels in each language.
- G. Compare and contrast the stress system of English and Spanish. Be sure to discuss a) the impact of stress on vowels, b) levels of accentuation, c) the relationship of stress to rhythm.
- H. On the surface, plural formation in English and Spanish appear to be very similar processes. However, they are not. Discuss the key differences between the two processes.

## II. **Second language acquisition** (Span. 424/524)

- A. Human language is said to be a hierarchical and modular discreet combinatorial system that is organized as a phrase structure grammar. Explain what is meant by each of these terms and provide illustrative examples as well as supporting evidence (Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*).
- B. Compare and contrast how the Behaviorist and Cognitivist schools of Psychology view and explain the process of first language acquisition.
- C. What is Universal Grammar? What is the idealized speaker-hearer?
- D. What is the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis? What are the various versions of it that have been proposed? What are the problems with this approach to second language learning?
- E. What is the Natural Approach? Explain each of its sub-theories.
- F. What is the Critical Period Hypothesis? What evidence is there for the validity of this hypothesis as it applies to first *and* second language acquisition?
- G. What are the different learner variables that can affect second language acquisition? What role do these play in learning a second language?

- H. What are learner styles and strategies? Provide examples of these.
- I. What is culture shock? What are the stages of acculturation in learning a foreign language?
- J. Explain the philosophical tenets and practices of each of the following methods of second language instruction. Provide a critical evaluation of each method:
  1. Total Physical Response
  2. Audio-Lingual
  3. Grammar Translation
  4. Community Counseling
  5. Suggestopaedia
  6. The Silent Way
- K. Compare and contrast first and second language acquisition.
- L. What is the ideal second-language learner like? What are his/her practices, goals, attitudes, etc.?
- M. Most people believe that knowing a language is mostly about knowing words. Do you agree or disagree with this?
- N. Most people believe that some languages are easier than others. What is the evidence for or against this assertion? Be sure to take into consideration differences between L1 and L2.
- O. According to Valdés (2003), what is the prevailing linguistic ideology of foreign language/Spanish language departments? What might the consequences be of this ideology?
- P. How does Spanish compare to other languages of study in the U.S. at the secondary and post secondary levels in terms of numbers of students? What are the main trends in language study in the U.S. over the last decades?

### III. **Spanish as a world language** (Spanish 427/527, 490/590)

- A. What are the social and historical conditions under which Spanish developed from Latin? Why/how did Latin break off into five distinct language groups in the Iberian Peninsula?
- B. What are the various classification schemes that have been applied to the dialects of Spanish? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? What are primary linguistic properties that distinguish the main dialectal regions of Spanish?
- C. Trace the development of the pronoun “vos” in the Spanish language from its Latin origins.

- D. How have each of the following foreign influences affected the Spanish language? Under what historical circumstances did these languages come to have an effect in Spanish?
- Arabic, Germanic languages, Amerindian languages, African languages, English
- E. How and when did Castilian emerge as the dominant language of Spain?
- F. Compare and contrast the status of Catalan, Galician, and Basque in modern day Spain.
- G. Describe the situation of Spanish in Europe, the Americas, and Asia, using the Kachru or Graddol models.
- E. How has the Spanish language changed by virtue of its contact with English in the U.S.?
- F. What role do age, gender, and social status play in language usage. Provide concrete examples from sociolinguistic studies of Spanish.
- G. What kinds of arguments are usually given against bilingual education? How are they flawed? What are some of the arguments in favor of bilingual education?
- H. What are the four main goals of the Spanish-for-Native speakers curriculum, as stated in the literature? Provide an explanation of each one of these (Guadalupe Valdés 1997, in in Colombi and Alarcón).
- I. Pino (1997) describes the 1990's as the decade when affective variables have come to occupy a central role in the SNS classroom. Why are affective factors so important in the SNS classroom? What are some of the techniques that have been developed by the SNS profession to improve the affective environment of the classroom (same as above)?
- J. What is the European view of bilingualism? How is this view at odds with emerging patterns of bilingualism involving English and Spanish (see Graddol 1997 and Carreira 2006)?
- K. Besides numbers of L1 speakers, what are other measures of a language's dominance? Explain using examples from English and Spanish.

#### IV. **Romance Linguistics/Historical Linguistics** (Span. 520, 528)

- A. Define each of the following terms and explain their role in the evolution of the Romance languages. Be sure to provide examples!
1. palatalization
  2. reanalysis
  3. metathesis
  4. degemination
  5. assimilation

6. elision
  7. epenthesis
  8. analytic v. synthetic structure
  9. simplification of hiatus
  10. diphthongization
  11. syllable structure
  12. stress
- B. How did the following grammatical units come to exist in the Romance languages?
1. the definite and indefinite articles
  2. the future tense
  3. the conditional tense
  4. prepositions
- C. Why is Spanish believed to be both archaic and innovative in its development from Latin?
- D. Describe the social and historical conditions under which the Romance languages developed.
- E. Describe the Latin vowel system and how it developed into Spanish.
- F. Where do the alternating diphthongs of Spanish come from?
- G. Describe, in broad terms, how the Latin case system worked. What remains of this system in the Spanish language as well as in the other Romance languages?
- H. What are the grammatical consequences that the loss of the Latin case system had on the Spanish language?
- I. Many people hold that Spanish is a free-word language. How accurate is this?
- J. Within the Romance verbal paradigm, the subjunctive appears to be particularly weak and subject to erosion. Provide examples of this fact from Spanish as well as other Romance languages.

## Sources of information

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