Diploma examination – questions on linguistics

1. The properties (design features) of language.

2. Discuss the importance of arbitrariness and displacement as features of human communication.

3. What are the main differences between human language and animal communication?

4. Is language uniquely human?

5. Describe some experiments aimed at teaching animals to use human language.

6. Discuss the theories of language origin.

7. Discuss the origins and the early history of writing.

8. What is the origin and the underlying principle of alphabetic writing? Explain the rebus principle.


10. The vocal tract: what are its parts, how is it used for generating sounds?

11. What is glottis? Describe the most basic states of the glottis. Support your description with the examples of sounds.

12. Discuss the criteria of description for language sounds (consonants and vowels).

13. What are the basic criteria for the classification of diphthongs? How would you classify Eng. /eI/ and /eI/?

14. Describe the articulatory characteristics of plosives/stops. What distinguishes /g/ from /η/?

15. What do the following sets of phonemes have in common? /e a n/, /b m v/, /f s d/?

16. How is phonetics different from phonology? What are the principal branches of phonetics?

17. Phonology and its basic concepts: phoneme and allophone. How would you describe the difference between the underlined sounds in the following example? sing ~ swing, /sɪŋ/ ~ /swɪŋ/

18. Phonological processes of connected/fast/colloquial speech. What process(es) does the following example illustrate? wouldn’t be /wʊdnt bi/ > /wʊbɪ/?

19. One of the most common processes of connected/fast/colloquial speech is assimilation. Discuss its types using the following examples: urban /ˈɜːrn/, question /ˈkwɛʃn/. 
20. The morpheme – definition and classification. Discuss the main differences between inflection and derivation.

21. What is word formation, what processes does it include? Which process is exemplified by smog and Spanglish?

22. What are suppletive forms? Provide at least one example (in English OR Polish).

23. How do open-class words and closed-class words differ? Give examples of each class of words.

24. Describe major differences between the subject of a clause, object of a verb and complement. Give an example of each.

25. What is syntax? What does it mean that syntax is recursive? What is a tree diagram?

26. What syntactic phenomenon is exemplified by the following sentences? Ann hit a man with an umbrella. Teachers should use more authentic materials – how does syntactic theory explain the special property of those sentences?

27. What are semantic/thematic roles? Discuss their types using the following example: Our coach broke down in the middle of the road to Boston.

28. Semantics: how can we analyze word meaning? What are semantic features?

29. Discuss the lexical relations of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy. What is the difference between polysemy and homonymy?

30. What are semantic fields? Do you know a dictionary that exploits the idea of semantic fields?

31. Explain the notions of syntagmatic and paradigmatic sense relationships.

32. What is grammar? What is the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar?

33. What are the major concerns of discourse analysis and text linguistics? What are cohesion and coherence?

34. Explain the difference between anaphoric and cataphoric reference. What type of reference does the following example illustrate? That's just my luck: first my car breaks down and then my mobile doesn't work, either.

35. Explain the term deixis/deictic expressions. What function do they serve in text? List three basic types of deictic expressions and give examples.

36. Pragmatics: what is it and what are its major concerns? Discuss conversational implicature or the linguistic phenomena connected with face and politeness.

37. The cooperative principle and the four maxims of conversation formulated by Paul Grice.

38. The typology of speech acts. What speech act is exemplified by the following: I’ll be back!
39. Direct and indirect speech acts. Give a pragmatic analysis of the following: *Would you be so kind as to open the door?*

40. Discuss the linguistic notions of style and register.

41. How is gender reflected in language?

42. What is the difference between a language and a dialect?

43. Discuss the similarities and differences between slang and jargon.

44. What are *pidgin* languages? Discuss some of their main characteristics and the difference between a pidgin and a Creole.

45. What is lingua franca?

46. Language and the brain – discuss the most basic facts and the development of research methods used in studying the connection between language and the brain.

47. Language and the brain – discuss aphasia and its types.

48. Discuss the notions of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism.

49. What does it mean when we say that some things are more highly codable in one language than in another? What does codability depend on?

50. What are lexical gaps? Do they make a text untranslatable? Why/Why not?

51. Why do languages change?

52. Discuss some examples of change in morphology and syntax.

53. Discuss some types/examples of sound change.

54. How does the lexicon change?

55. What are the main concerns of historical linguistics? What sources and methods does it use?

56. What does the term Proto-Indo-European mean? What words are referred to as cognates?

57. Discuss the main differences between Modern English and Old English.

58. Explain the difference between synchronic and diachronic linguistics.

59. Explain the notion of language families. What are the major language families in Europe?