

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2019

Round 1



Problem 9. You speak Ndebele, don't you? (25 marks)

Below are some phrases from the Ndebele language, spoken in parts of southern Africa (mainly Zimbabwe), along with their English translations.



1	Ufuna ukunatha itiye na?	Do you want to drink tea?
2	Yebo, ngiyafuna.	Yes, I do (want to).
3	Sifuna ukuhamba.	We want to go.
4	Umfana uyapheka.	The boy is cooking.
5	Ngifunda ukupheka.	I am learning to cook.
6	Abafana bayahamba.	The boys are going.
7	Abangane bayahamba na?	Are the friends going?
8	Umngane uyahamba angithi?	The friend is going, isn't he?
9	Abafana banatha itiye na?	Are the boys drinking tea?
10	Umngane uyanatha.	The friend is drinking.
11	Banjani abantwana?	How are the children?
12	Uthunga njani?	How do you sew?
13	Ufuna ukufunda angithi?	He wants to learn, doesn't he?
14	Yebo, uyafuna.	Yes, he does (want to).
15	Bangaphi abafana?	Where are the boys?
16	Ubaba ubona umfana.	Father sees the boy.
17	Ngifunda ukukhuluma indebele ngaphi?	Where do I learn to speak Ndebele?

Q.1. Translate the following sentences into English:

- (a) Yebo, bafuna ukubona.
(b) Umfana ufunda ukuthunga njani?
(c) Singaphi?
(d) Ngipheka itiye.

Q.2. Translate the following sentences into Ndebele:

- (a) How is the child? (b) We are learning to cook, aren't we?
(c) Yes, they are speaking. (d) Do they want to see the father?

Q.3. From the list of Ndebele sentences, select one that has two possible meanings, and explain why both meanings are possible.

Q.4. (This question will only be marked as a tie-breaker.) On a separate sheet of paper, explain the relevant parts of Ndebele grammar as clearly and concisely as possible. **Don't forget to write your name on your answer!**

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Solution and marking.

Scoring (max 17)

- Q.1: 2 points per correct English sentence, 1 with one error. (max 8)
- Q.2: 2 per correct sentence, 1 with one error. (max 8)
 - Wrong word order is an error.
- Q.3: This is a bad question, so just 1 for a reasonable attempt. (max 1)
 - Accept either the sentence's number or the whole sentence.
 - Insist on an explanation, not just a sentence.
 - Accept any explanation for ambiguity, including:
 - Uncertainty about person: u- can mean either 'you' or 'he/she' (or second or third person).
 - Uncertainty about aspect: any present verb can translate as either present simple or present progressive.

Q.1.	a) Yes, they want to see. c) Where are we?	b) How does the boy learn to sew? (accept <i>How is the boy learning to sew?</i>) d) I am cooking (the) tea. (accept <i>I cook (the) tea.</i>)
Q.2.	a) Unjani umntwana? c) Yebo, bayakhulumu.	b) Sifunda ukupheka angithi? d) Bafuna ukubona ubaba na?
Q.3.	Any sentence + an explanation as explained above.	

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Commentary

Ndebele verbs have prefixes to mark the subject:

ngi- - 1st person singular

u- - 2nd person singular or 3rd person singular

si- - 1st person plural

ba- - 3rd person plural

There is also the prefix *uku-*, marking the infinitive, and the infix *-ya-*, which marks a verb with no “following” word, either an object or an adverb. It is still used when the verb is followed by the question particles *na* or *angithi* (marking a “tag” question).

The question-word adverbs *njani* and *ngaphi* can also act as verbs (“Where is she?” = “She wheres?”), in which case they take the subject prefixes above.

The Ndebele nouns given here are marked by the prefix *um-* in the singular and *aba-* in the plural.

Source: <http://northernndebele.blogspot.com/p/lessons.html>