

## Practice Unit 1

1. Consider the meaning of the word *language* in the following expressions and paraphrase it in such a way as to bring out the contrasting usages clearly:

Example:

*The language of the British press has changed considerably over the past few decades.*

The word *language* here denotes a specific way or style of using the English language in a particular written genre.

*Language is what distinguishes human beings from apes.*

*She teaches sign language in a school for the deaf.*

*Sally can conduct fluent conversations in at least four languages.*

*Watch your language, kid!*

*As a teacher I sometimes feel that the children speak a completely different language from me.*

*Lëtzebuergesch used to be a dialect of German but has been one of the three official languages of Luxemburg since 1984.*

*Who was the guy who got the Nobel Prize for decoding the language of the bees?*

*If you know how to read the language of graffiti, they tell you a lot about life in the city.*

2. Why did the instructional designer quoted in section 1.2 in the book refer to herself as *a British lady* rather than *a British woman* or *an Englishwoman*? What are the differences in meaning between the words *lady* and *woman* in present-day English?
  - a) As a first step, note down your intuitions about – say – the contrast between *Ask the lady over there* and *Ask the woman over there*.
  - b) Discuss your intuitions with a native speaker of English and consult entries for *woman* and *lady* in a dictionary of your choice.
  - c) Collect a largish number of authentic uses of the two words from corpora and discuss the material.

3. To prove the point made in the book that knowledge of language history (diachrony) is irrelevant to the working of language as a structured system (synchrony), look up the words *woman* and *lady* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). This is the largest and most comprehensive dictionary ever produced for any language. It occupies almost two metres of shelf-space in its printed version, and is likely to be on hand in your departmental or university library. Alternatively, if your institution has a subscription, you may check the regularly updated online version (<http://www.oed.com>). One special feature of the OED is that it charts the history of English words beginning with the first attested uses and through all subsequent expansions and changes of meaning. What do the entries for *woman* and *lady* say about the earliest meanings of the words? Is this knowledge useful in any way?

4. Consult a native speaker of English about his or her response to the following forms:

*We don't need no education.*

*Hopefully, the war will soon be ended.*

*Let me assure you that I am not actuated by mercenary considerations.*

*Had I in the least surmised that it was her husband's rash purchase of an expensive automobile that she was going on about I would have told her to shut up and get her act together.*

5. Return to the "Platonic" problem of the appropriateness of the name to the thing and consider it in the light of the following data:

1) The conventional representations of the sound of a sneeze are *hatschi* in German, *atishoo/ atchoo* in British English, and *ah-choo* in American English.

2) The conventional representations for a cock crowing are *kikeriki* in German, *chicherichi* in Italian, *cocorico* in French, *cock-a-doodle-doo* in English, *kukuriku* in Russian, *kokekoko* in Japanese, and *kong-shi* in Chinese.

6. Indicate which of the following /t/-s are candidates for flapping in American English.

*quantum physics, quantity, quantitative, quantitatively*

*I go to school every day*

*If he goes, I go too*

## 7. Consulting linguistic corpora

This is a brief extract from a conversation among working class speakers from Central Northern England (source: BNC KB1 4334ff.):

Corrinne: She's not interested.

Albert: No. I think she'll be married shortly.

June: I can see her marrying him.

Corrinne: (unclear)

June: Yeah. But he's one of them lads where she'll never have owt, cos he don't do, he won't bloody work will he?

Corrinne: Well he's doing taxis.

And this is an extract from a scientific paper included in the Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (F-LOB) corpus of written British English (text J 09):

In a recent paper (Kemball-Cook et al, 1990), we demonstrated a modified sodium dodecyl sulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) method for visualization of factor VIII heavy chain (FVIII HC) polypeptides. This approach, based on that first described by Weinstein et al (1981) enables FVIII structure to be studied in a wide range of samples including plasma without further purification. We have therefore used this technique to study the proteolytic breakdown of FVIII HC in plasma and concentrates when exposed to a range of coagulation enzymes.

Which text is easier to understand, and why?

8. As you have worked hard, it is time for some relief. "What the writers say" is an occasional feature in the book highlighting some of the more bizarre and unexpected ways in which linguistics figures in English literature. The passage is from a novel by Anthony Burgess (1917-1993). Edwin is a professional linguist who all of a sudden finds himself in a psychiatric hospital and has to explain his job ...

### What the writers say

"Let's sit down, shall we," said Charlie, and Edwin, feeling that he was a bad host, led his visitors over to his bed. "Now," said Charlie, "what is it your wife here says that you do?"

"Linguistics."

"Aha." The three of them sat, leg-swinging, on the bed. "I've never heard of it," said Charlie, "and that's a fact. Mind you, I'm not saying that there's no such thing, but no mention of it has ever come my way before."

"Oh," said Edwin, "it does exist."

"That's as may be, but, if it does exist, it'll be above the heads of people like me and her." He jerked his head towards Sheila. "Me, I clean windows. Anybody can understand what that is, and you don't get put into places like this [the hospital ward] if you do a job like that. Mind you, you can get put into a hospital, if you're a window-cleaner, but not into a hospital like this one, because window-cleaning doesn't affect the brain." (Anthony Burgess, *The Doctor is Sick*, Penguin ed., p. 15)

Having worked your way through Unit 1, could you do a better job than Edwin at explaining what linguistics is about?