Answers Unit 1

1. *Sally can conduct fluent conversations in at least four languages.*
   The term *language* here denotes the specific linguistic systems of particular communities. The language faculty is shared by all human beings; the way it manifests itself differs from community to community.

   Watch your language, kid!
   This is a warning to a young speaker. Of course, it is not intended as an encouragement to protect a linguistic system. *Language* is used to refer to a potentially impolite or offensive way of using the community's language (i.e. a personal style of using the language).

   As a teacher I sometimes feel that the children speak a completely different language from me.
   In this example, the term *language* is also used to refer to a particular style of using a given language, this time emphasising ongoing language change across generations.

   Lëtzebuergesch used to be a dialect of German but has been one of the three official languages of Luxemburg since 1984.
   This use of the word *language* highlights the fact that people are sensitive to the social status of particular ways of speaking. A type of speech which enjoys official recognition or provides the model for writing tends to be designated as *language*, whereas speech forms without such recognition and prestigious functions tend to be classified as *dialects*. It is impossible to justify the distinction between the two on purely linguistic grounds (such as phonetic, lexical or grammatical similarity), because it is ultimately a result of historical and social circumstance (as our example makes clear). Max Weinreich (1894-1969), a renowned scholar on the Yiddish language, coined the widely quoted saying that "a language is a dialect with an army and a navy" – first published (in Yiddish) in a 1945.

   Who was the guy who got the Nobel Prize for decoding the language of the bees?
   Language is here used metaphorically, or in a loose sense, to refer to any system of communication. The frequency of such uses should not blind us to the fact that there are profound differences between natural human languages and "animal languages" or, for that matter, computer "programming languages."

   If you know how to read the language of graffiti, they tell you a lot about life in the city.
   Here, *language* is used as a synonym for *code*, any conventionalised system for conveying information.

2. a) You will probably be aware that *woman* is the general term for female adult human beings while *lady* may refer to women of noble rank. However, it will also be clear to you that "the lady over there" need not necessarily refer to a noblewoman. Note down any further established uses of the words that you can think of.

   b) The "solution" will emerge as part of your enquiries. Even if you are tempted to use online dictionaries, it will be better to go for a mid- to large-sized printed dictionary for this task.

   c) These are 10 instances of *lady* found in the spoken texts of the British National Corpus (BNC).

Sandy means an awful lot in that old **lady**'s life
well unfortunately, the **lady** who lives in the top cottage is now in (ANON) erm hospital.
and all the **lady** members always either before or on the day, come up with bags of stuff
[Calling on a member of the audience during a meeting] yes, **lady** at the back
erm the Independent is famous as being the newspaper which when Prince Charles and **Lady** Diana got married many years ago, they reported it with a single paragraph
a very very happy and successful year to both you and your good **lady**
but the business we got from it won't be big, one **lady** rang up and said I heard about you on Radio York
training cabin staff **lady**, I've forgotten her name
will you let the **lady** speak please, you've had your turn.
I'd like to make a special thanks (pause) to **Lady** Chandler

You can see that, as would be expected, *Lady* (with capital L) is used in its literal sense, as a title in names. In addition, however, there are several uses which are motivated by a desire to be polite, using *lady* in cases in which *woman* would be factually appropriate. Individually, each of these uses is intended as a nice gesture. In sum, however, they add up to trivialising the meaning of the word. A term originally denoting a woman of high social rank becomes a possibly patronising general term for any woman – a type of language change which feminists have observed and deplored in this instance as in many others. The more examples of actual language use from corpora you will look at, the more detailed your insights into such issues of usage will become.

Now, to continue this data-driven analysis of linguistic meaning, look at 10 instances of the word *woman* from the same corpus and see what happens if you try to replace *woman* by *lady*:

we had er, er a **woman** last time who'd been to Central America recently

how would he have (pause) er replied to a young **woman** who came to me fairly recently whose husband had just left home

here is a little old **woman** in her upper eighties, never been married, no relatives

Recently, recently Dave (ANON) and I er were grabbed by the throat by em a **woman** and her husband from Worksop called (ANON)

this is written by one, one man and er, or one **woman**, and we're just saying that the wording could be improved

but the fact remains that to a man or **woman** your council members are current sailors or actively involved in the sport

it was er a very emotional story of a glamorous young **woman** saying I can't cope with being treated by the media and other people,

we had that little **woman** in cor she (SP:J8DPS001) cos (SP:PS3S7) bored the pants off them! Ooh sorry!

Did you sign both? (SP:PS3ST) Yeah. (SP:PS3SW) Okay. (unclear) **woman** might want to slap her name down.

we're digressing. We'll look into this. Right, er riot **woman**, or whatever you wish to be called. Girl (unclear)

3. According to the OED, the word *woman* is an Old English compound consisting of the Old English word for "woman" *wif* and the Old English word for "human being" *man*. The meaning "female human being" has persisted to the present day, but formally the word is no longer recognisable as a compound. The particular advantage of the OED for this kind of historical study is that it traces the meanings of a word from the earliest attestations to the present and gives authentic examples as citations. The earliest meanings of *woman* are:
   - An adult female human being (earliest attestation from the year 893)
   - The female human being; the female part of the human race, the female sex (usage documented by attestations from 950)
   - A female servant, esp. a lady's maid or personal attendant (from 766)

   Lady goes back to an Old English compound consisting of *hlaf* (= loaf, bread) and *dig* (= to knead). The earliest meanings of *lady* are:
   - A mistress in relation to servants or slaves; the female head of a household (earliest attestation 825)
   - A woman who rules over subjects, or to whom obedience or feudal homage is due; the feminine designation corresponding to *lord* (from 1000)
   - A woman of superior position in society, or to whom such a position is conventionally or by courtesy attributed (from 1205)
   - A woman whose manners, habits, and sentiments have the refinement characteristic of the higher ranks of society. (1861)

The first traces of the polite (or condescending) use of *lady* thus go back to the Middles Ages, and the usage emerges fully formed in 1861.

4. *We don't need no education.*
   Informants responding to this example are very likely to point out that double negation of this type is considered a grammatical sign of uneducated or non-standard usage.

   Hopefully, the war will soon be ended.
   Unlike the first example, this use of *hopefully* as a sentence adverb is not considered a sign of uneducated usage but still disliked as an innovation by many speakers. Such speakers will point out that the supposedly correct use of *hopefully* is as a manner adverb, as in *they were all looking ahead hopefully*.

   Let me assure you that I am not actuated by mercenary considerations.
   On hearing this sentence people are likely to comment on its formal "Latinate" vocabulary (*actuate, mercenary, consideration*), which would be most unlikely to occur in this degree of concentration in present-day English. Respondents well versed in 19th-century British fiction will additionally recognise an allusion to Mr. Micawber, a character from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849), who is famous for his pompous diction.

   Had I in the least surmised that it was her husband's purchase of an expensive automobile that made her flip her lid, I would have told her to shut up and not get her knickers in a twist over it.
   This sentence is funny because it mixes very formal style in its first part (*surmise*, *purchase*, inversion of subject and auxiliary in the subordinate conditional clause) with informal and slangy expressions in its second half.

5. These onomatopoetic expressions are commonly used to make the point that the connection between sound and meaning is not arbitrary at least in some words. Note, however, that any acoustic similarity between the sound of a sneeze, or a cock crowing, and the words used to denote it is overlaid by arbitrary language-specific conventions, for example with regard to the number of syllables used. With regard to one verbal realisation of the sneeze in British English, there is even a dialect difference in comparison to American English. We would definitely not want to conclude from this that some British speakers sneeze in their own accent (though they use their own expression to talk about the experience).

6. *quantum physics, quantity, quantitative, quantitatively*
   I go to school every day
   If he goes, I go too

   All the underlined *t*-s can be reduced, and reduction follows the same rules: /t/ is flapped between vowels, both within a word and across words, but only if the second vowel is not stressed. This environment is provided in the ending of *quant**ity*** and in ***go to***. The conditions do not apply, however, to the second /t/ in *quanti**t**ative* and the /t/ in *go **t**oo*, as here the vowels following the /t/ bear stress. Reduction of /t/ regularly occurs after nasals if the following vowel is not stressed. This explains the cases of *qua**nt**um*, *qua**nt**ity* and *qua**nt**itative*.

7. Both texts are difficult to understand, but for contrasting reasons. The spoken text is embedded in a communicative context that needs to be known (or at least inferred) to get the message of the words. Furthermore, parts of it are not in standard English but in a North-of-England dialect. Foreign learners of English and even some native speakers of the language from outside Britain may find it difficult to understand a sentence such as "he's one of them lads where she'll never have owt, cos he don't do, he won't bloody work will he?" = "he is one of those young men from whom she will never have anything, because he doesn't do [any work]/ won't really work …"

   The second example, from a scholarly article in the natural sciences, shows a simple and common clause pattern (SVO), but has an extremely complicated object noun phrase.

8. Work out an answer to this question by yourself!