

3 Language learning

Activities

Understanding the text: unknown vocabulary 1 How do you deal with unknown vocabulary? Tick the strategies that you use.

- Look it up in the dictionary immediately.
- Ask a teacher/friend.
- Try to guess the meaning.
- Ignore it and carry on reading.
- Look it up in the dictionary if it occurs frequently.

Study tip

Being able to ignore words or guess the meaning of unknown words from context is a useful strategy that helps you to improve your reading speed. It is also useful when you need a general understanding of a text.

2 In this extract from the Unit 3 text, every eighth word is missing. Read it and answer the questions below.

Language is a set of symbols that ideas and enables people to think and with one another. Verbal (spoken) language and (written or gestured) language help us describe One of our most important human attributes the ability to use language to share experiences, feelings and knowledge with others. Language create visual images in our head, such 'The kittens look like little cotton balls' (..... and Porter, 1991). Language also allows people distinguish themselves from outsiders and maintain group and solidarity (Farb, 1973).

- 1 What different types of language do humans use?
- 2 Why is language important for groups of people?
- 3 Write a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the paragraph.

3 In this extract from the Unit 3 text, every fifth word is missing. Read it and answer the questions below.

Language is not solely human characteristic. Other animals sounds, gestures, touch and to communicate with one , but they use signals fixed meanings that are to the immediate situation (..... present) and that cannot past or future situations. example, chimpanzees can use of Standard American Sign and manipulate physical objects make 'sentences', but they not physically endowed with vocal apparatus needed to the consonants required for language. As a result, animals cannot transmit the complex aspects of culture their offspring. Humans have unique ability to manipulate to express abstract concepts rules and thus to and transmit culture from generation to the next.

- 1 What information can animals communicate?
- 2 Why are animals unable to communicate verbally?
- 3 Write a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the paragraph.

Critical thinking: 4 a Read these sentences. Decide whether each one is a fact (F) or an opinion (O).
fact and opinion

- 1 It is estimated that there are 6,909 languages in the world.
- 2 Chinese is an important language for English speakers to learn.
- 3 Everybody should learn at least two languages at school.
- 4 In the UK, it is common to learn at least one foreign language at secondary school.
- 5 Young people learn languages more easily than adults.
- 6 Spanish is the mother tongue of 400 million people in the world.

b Look again at the opinions. What evidence or examples could you use to strengthen them?

5 a Look at these two extracts from the Unit 3 text. Which is a fact, and which is an opinion?

1

Language is not solely a human characteristic. Other animals use sounds, gestures, touch and smell to communicate with one another, but they use signals with fixed meanings that are limited to the immediate situation (the present) and that cannot encompass past or future situations.

2

Does language *create* or simply *communicate* reality? Anthropological linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf have suggested that language not only expresses our thoughts and perceptions, but also influences our perception of reality. According to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, language shapes the view of reality of its speakers (Whorf, 1956; Sapir, 1961). If people are able to think only through language, then language must precede thought.

b What questions would you need to ask to accept or reject the opinion?

c Read the section of the Unit 3 text entitled *Language and social reality*. What do other social scientists think of the hypothesis? Do they agree or disagree with it?

6 Read the Unit 3 text again and answer these questions.

- 1 What are the similarities and differences between animals and humans? Make a list of as many points as you can find.
- 2 Why might some features of life be ignored, according to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis?
- 3 List three ways that the English language has changed to become more ‘gender neutral’.
- 4 How are language and cultural identity connected?
- 5 How are language and power connected?

Using the text: 7 Read this essay question and answer the questions below.
summarizing

A language is more than simply a means of communication. A language reveals features of its speakers’ culture and society, and so language learners should be aware of these features. Discuss.

- 1 What kind of essay are you being asked to write?
- 2 What information would you need to find to answer this question?
- 3 Using the essay question as a guide, what information would each paragraph in the main body of the essay include?

8 a Read this extract from the Unit 3 text and make notes on it in relation to the essay question in Exercise 7.

Language is an important means of cultural transmission. Through language, children learn about their cultural heritage and develop a sense of personal identity in relationship to their group. For example, the Latino people of New Mexico and south Texas use *dichos* – proverbs or sayings that are unique to the Spanish language – as a means of expressing themselves and as a reflection of their cultural heritage.

Language is also a source of power and social control; language perpetuates inequalities between people and between groups because words are used (whether or not intentionally) to ‘keep people in their place’. As the linguist Tannen (1993:B5) has suggested, ‘The devastating group hatreds that result in so much suffering in our own country and around the world are related in origin to the small intolerances in our everyday conversations – our readiness to attribute good intentions to ourselves and bad intentions to others.’ Language, then, is a reflection of our feelings and values.

b Summarize the extract in your own words.