

Answer Key Unit 7 – Historical linguistics

Module 1

Language family tree - answers:

1. Celtic, Germanic, Italic, Hellenic, Balto-Slavic, Indo-Iranian.
2. English belongs to the Anglo-Frisian branch of the West-Germanic language family.
3. Students' own answers (Italic, Hellenic or Balto-Slavic, for example)
4. The asterisks indicate that these are hypothetical and are being reconstructed by linguists.

Exercise 1:

English	good	house	water	rain
Swedish	god, gott	hus	vatten	regn
Dutch	goed	huis	water	regen
German	gut	Haus	Wasser	Regen
Icelandic	godur	hús	vatn	rigning
Frisian	goed	hûs	wetter	rein
French	bon	maison	eau	pluie
Italian	buono	casa	acqua	pioggia
Spanish	bueno	casa	agua	lluvia

The languages English, Swedish, Dutch, German, Icelandic, and Frisian are quite similar because all of them belong to the “Germanic” branch of the Proto-Indo-European family tree. On the other hand, French, Italian and Spanish look quite different; they belong to the “Italic” branch of the Indo-European family tree.

Exercise 2:

There is a difference in meaning: the words “swine”, “cow” and “sheep” refer to animals that are still alive, while “pork”, “beef” and “mouton” relate to the meat of these animals. There is also a divergence in register: the French usually belonged to the upper class and saw the meat on the plate. The English, however, had to take care of the animals and therefore tended to use the English words that had Germanic roots.

There are plenty more examples of such pairs in English – try to combine the French loanwords with the Germanic words. It is quite impressive how many standard words with French origin we



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use in English, isn't it?

Matching pairs - answers:

1H, 2P, 3B, 4K, 5S, 6A, 7I, 8J, 9E, 10R, 11F, 12Q, 13L, 14G, 15N, 16O, 17C, 18D, 19M

ask – question

freedom – liberty

calf – veal

ox – beef

smell – odour

chicken – poulet

dove – pigeon

bring – carry

help – aid

buy – purchase

weep – cry

harbour – port

answer – reply

fall – autumn

wish – desire

wild – savage

tough – difficult

gift - present

end – finish



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Module 2:

Transcriptions:

car, park, hear, north, November, December

Observation: The first person dropped the /r/, whereas the second one seemed to pronounce it.

car (BrE /kɑː/ and NAmE /kɑːr/)

park (BrE /pɑːk/ and NAmE /pɑːrk/)

hear (BrE /hɪə/ and NAmE /hɪr/)

north (BrE /nɔːθ/ and NAmE /nɔːrθ/)

November (BrE /nəʊ'vembə/ and NAmE /nəʊ'vembər/)

December (BrE /dɪ'sembə/ and NAmE /dɪ'sembər/)

Exercise 1 - Answers

Clip 1: rhotic - Northern Irish. Additional information: Uncle Colm played by Kevin McAleer, from Omagh, Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Clip taken from the series "Derry Girls".

Clip 2: non-rhotic (Richard Ayoade) and rhotic (Paul Rudd) - London and New Jersey. Additional information: clip taken from the British series "Travel Man".

Clip 3: rhotic - North America. Additional information. Jim Parsons / Sheldon Cooper (Houston), Kaley Cuoco / Penny (California), Johnny Galecki (Belgium, but US-American actor). Clip taken from the US-American series "Big Bang Theory".

Clip 4: non-rhotic - Northern England (Liverpoolian). Additional information: Kenneth Du Beke / Tony Maudsley (Liverpool) and Maureen / Elsie Kelly (Liverpool). Clip taken from the British series "Benidorm".

Clip 5: rhotic - Illinois (Berwyn). Additional information: Saul Goodman / Robert John Odenkirk . Clip taken from the American series "Breaking Bad"

Exercise 2 - Answers

1. aunt /ænt/ (no split, American English speaker)
2. branch /brɑːntʃ/ (split, (southern) British English speaker)
3. can't /kænt/ (no split, American English speaker)
4. dance /dɑːns/ (split, (southern) British English speaker)
5. path /pɑːθ/ (split, Australian English speaker)
6. nasty /'næsti/ (no split, American English speaker)



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Module 3

Introduction – answers:

Students' own answers. Here are some ideas.

1. **Vocabulary:** some words (such as *cyning*, *ic*, *mīn*) sound similar to German due to their Germanic origin. On the other hand, words like “*ġeaf*”, “*sweord*” and “*cwēne*” are close to their counterparts in Modern English (“*gave*”, “*sword*” and “*queen*”), as they sound similar and have retained their meaning.
2. **Syntax:** in the second sentence, we need to alter the word order in the translation if we do not want to use the preposition «to».
3. **Morphology:** Old English has more word endings than Modern English, particularly noticeable with articles.

Exercise 1 – answers:

1. nominative
2. genitive
3. accusative
4. nominative
5. nominative
6. dative (the same as in German!)
7. accusative
8. dative (the same as in German!)

Exercise 2 – answers:

foot – feet (irregular, Old English)

analysis – analyses (irregular, Latin and Greek words)

tomato – tomatoes (regular, -o > -es)

sheep – sheep (irregular, no change, often animals)

leaf – leaves (regular, -f > -ves)

box – boxes (regular, -es)

man – men (irregular, Old English)

cactus – cacti (irregular, Latin and Greek words)

woman – women (irregular, Old English)

fish – fish (no change, often animals)

child – children (irregular, Old English)

ox – oxen (irregular, Old English)

wife – wives (regular, -f > -ves)



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mouse – mice (irregular, Old English)

hero – heroes (regular, -o > -es)

tooth – teeth (irregular, Old English)

crisis – crises (irregular, Latin and Greek words)

goose – geese (irregular, Old English)

potato – potatoes (regular, -o > -es)

deer – deer (irregular, no change, often animals)

fungus – fungi (irregular, Latin and Greek words)

person – persons / people (irregular, Old English)

life – lives (regular, -f > -ves)



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Module 4

Number of words - answer:

The numbers can vary, so consider them as rough estimates for comparison. If we take the number of entries, the Oxford English Dictionary lists about 171,476 words in current use. The Italian dictionary includes around 260,000 words, Spanish has 93,000 words, German encompasses 145,000 words and French 130,000 words¹.

Short story - answer:

The man turns the whole system upside down and is not understood by other people. He cannot communicate with other people anymore.

The short story emphasises that meaning cannot be assigned by a single user, it must happen as a general agreement within a speaker community. Even though it is an extreme example, it also shows that word meanings can change over time, which is interesting for historical linguistics. In addition to its denotation (= literal meaning), a word evokes connotations (= secondary meanings) that can change over time.²

Exercise 1 – answers:

Students' own answers, some suggestions:

guy – in 1605, a guy called Guy tried to blow up the English Parliament. The plot failed, but people still commemorate it on 5 November. They parade and burn a dummy that resembles him. Consequently, the word “guy” started to describe people who looked weird. In the late 1800s, it began to mean ‘any man.’ As time went on, it became increasingly popular and started to replace “fellow” and “bloke,” particularly in the USA. Used in plural, it can refer to a mixed group consisting of both men and women.

naughty - in the 14th century, the word meant "needy" or "having nothing." Over the course of time, it also took on the negative meanings "evil," or "corrupt." In 1869, the meaning of being ‘sexually promiscuous’ was added.

Nevertheless, if we talk about children, this word can be used in a less negative sense, meaning ‘disobedient’ or ‘misbehaving’. Thus, if we consider someone naughty, they might just not be behaving well.³

¹ Andrews, T. (2023, May 1). Which language is richest in words? <https://ititranslates.com/blog/which-language-is-richest-in-words/>

² Nordquist, R. (2019, November 4). *What is semantic change in English grammar?* Thoughtco. <https://www.thoughtco.com/semantic-change-words-1692078#:~:text=In%20semantics%20and%20historical%20linguistics,lexical%20change%2C%20and%20semantic%20progression>

³Douglas Harper (n.d.). Naughty. In: *Search online etymology dictionary*. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=naughty>



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silly - derives from Old English “gesælig”, which means ‘happy’ and ‘prosperous’. In the 13th century, it evolved to get the meaning ‘pious, blessed, innocent’, from later ‘harmless’ to the rather negative significance of ‘foolish, lacking in mind’ in the 1570s.⁴

gay - the word "gay" has a long history. In the 13th century, it originally meant "light-hearted" and later became associated with "bright". Over time, it also took on the meaning of "happy." However, in 1637 (!), it started having negative connotations like immorality, either in a sexual context (similar to "prostitute" or "womanizer"), or generally for a "deceitful" person.

In the US, the term changed more at the end of the 19th century. While it first was used to describe a group of people familiar with gay nightlife, it soon began to refer to homosexuals, first only within the community. Nowadays, it's mostly used neutrally to refer to people's sexual orientation.

Exercise 2 - answers:

nice - amelioration

guy - generalisation

naughty - pejoration

silly - pejoration

sensitive - amelioration

girl - narrowing

thing - generalisation

awful - pejoration

⁴ Douglas Harper (n.d.). Silly. In: *Search online etymology dictionary*. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=silly>