

SAMPLE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 3: Subsystems of language

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SAMPLE

The Subsystems of Language

As it appears in Units 1 - 4

The subsystems of language are the essential organizing tools for exploring, discussing and understanding linguistic concepts. **Morphology** explores how words are formed; **Phonology** allows us to study the sound system of language; **Syntax** provides opportunities to examine how phrases and clauses are put together to create meaning; **Discourse** follows the conversation or text to determine how linguistic influences affect meaning; **Semantics** is concerned with meaning. The five subsystems help us to understand how language is constructed. The following questions will test your knowledge and understanding of these areas.

Phonetics and Phonology – the study of the sound systems and different patterns of sound that can occur in a language. It is concerned with the mechanics and acoustics of speech, such as where we make sounds in the mouth or places of articulation. It includes the following features:

- prosodic features: pitch, stress, volume, tempo and intonation
- vocal effects: coughs, laughter, breath
- sounds in connected speech and connected speech processes: assimilation, vowel reduction, elision, insertion
- features of Broad, General and Cultivated accents in Australian English
- phonological patterning in texts: alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhythm, rhyme
- an awareness of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and the phonetic transcription of English.

Review Questions

Part of our speech is how we pronounce certain words, phrases or sentence. We express our feelings through the way we talk. We can't and don't always speak in a monotone voice as it can become tedious and tiring. The way that we use correct pronunciation has to do with our pace, volume, pitch and stress. These are referred to as prosodics.

1. Discuss the use of pitch and provide an example.

2. Stress places emphasis on a word in a sentence or a particular syllable of a lexeme. Words with more than one syllable will have a syllable that receives the main or primary stress. There are many pairs of syllables that are distinguished only by their stress pattern.

Identify the word class for each underlined word and indicate, with an apostrophe, where the stress should be placed.

a) 'They are happy and at peace, refusing to think beyond the present'

b) 'May I present my wife?'

3. Pace and Volume

Through the use of timing, we are able to express our excitement by speaking very quickly and incoherently. When we are lost in a train of thoughts however, it can be noted that we speak in a much slower tempo and quieter tone.

In the following examples, comment on the emotions communicated.

a) 'Peter, for the fiftieth time, be quiet!'

b) 'Aunty Jane just passed away'

Phonological patterning refers to the stylistic features used to create different effects in texts. It is frequently used in poetry. Read the following poem and comment on the phonological stylistic features listed.

Snake slithers
among stones
coils and loops
and hisses
forked tongue
darts as fast
as an arrow,
aims and misses.

Snake glides
over pebbles,
sleeps, snoozing
in the sun,
hunger long-

4. Find an example of each of the following phonological stylistic features and provide a short definition:

Alliteration _____

Assonance _____

Onomatopoeia _____

Rhyme _____

Australia has three recognised accents: Broad, General and Cultivated. Define each one and provide an example of a well-known Australian who uses that particular accent.

5. _____

Broad _____

General _____

Cultivated _____

Solutions to Review Questions

Q1. Pitch: Notice that when you read out a question or ask a question, the pitch or melody in your voice will rise and fall and the pattern of pitch changes. We do this by altering the pitch of our voice and hence, changing the rate at which our vocal cords vibrate. The faster your vocal cords vibrate, the higher the pitch will be and vice versa. Let's use a common example to demonstrate the significance of a pitch in the function of the meaning of sentences:

'Are you coming to my house tonight?'

Now compare this to:

'You coming to my house tonight?'

Did you notice how in the first example, there was a strong final rising intonation which placed emphasis on the question? Did you also note that in the second example, it didn't really sound like a question but the rising intonation made it sound like one? This is all to do with the pitch levels in our speech sounds.

Q2. In this example, an apostrophe is used to indicate stress on the word 'present.'

They are happy and at peace, refusing to think beyond the 'present. (noun – stress on the first syllable.)

May I pre'sent my wife? (verb – stress on the second syllable.)

Q3.

a) 'Peter, for the fiftieth time, be quiet!'

b) 'Aunty Jane just passed away'

How loud or soft you talk can determine your feelings. In example a, you were able to read those extracts with a feeling of excitement and anger. Loud sounds tend to demonstrate these emotions, whilst soft sounds (example b) express a feeling of sadness or intimacy.

Q4.

Alliteration: 'Snake, slithers ... stones...', '...sleeps, snoozing in the sun ...' – the repetition of the 's' sound at the beginning of words

Assonance: '...still, till...' - the use of identical vowel sounds within words

Onomatopoeia: '...hisses...' – words which imitate sounds

Rhyme: ‘...in the sun...’, ‘...day is done...’ – word endings which have the same vowel and consonant sounds

Q5.

Broad – viewed as a working class accent, connotations of ‘mateship’, indicator of social class, more pronounced diphthong – Paul Hogan (Crocodile Dundee)

General – commonly spoken by the majority and tending more towards the Cultivated end of the continuum – Tony Abbott

Cultivated – the prestige variety, closer to the British ‘Received Pronunciation’ – Cate Blanchett

Q6. Free Morphemes: Words like ‘the’ and ‘pet’ are examples of free morphemes. They are considered free morphemes because they can stand alone and still make grammatical sense as a word. The two types of free morphemes are content and functional morphemes. Content morphemes have meanings outside the language, so they refer to something in actual existence (such as a table). Functional morphemes however, have no meaning by themselves as they deal with the relationships between the content items. Consider the following example:

‘The boy has the ball’

The items ‘boy’ and ‘ball’ are both content morphemes because they refer to something in real life. The lexemes ‘the’ and ‘has’, on the other hand, do not contain any meaning on their own and are therefore functional morphemes.

Bound Morphemes: Bound morphemes are opposite to free morphemes. They cannot exist by themselves as a word and instead change or add to the meaning of the root word (free morphemes). There are three types of bound morphemes in the English language: prefixes, suffixes and infixes.

Prefixes are placed at the beginning of the root or stem. Words such as ‘incomplete’ and ‘indecent’ both have the prefix ‘in’ attached.

Suffixes follow the root (these are more common in English). Commonly used suffixes include: -s, -ing and -ed

Infixes occur within the word. They are very rare in most languages and in English are only found when using colloquial intensifiers such as ‘absofreakinlutely’ and ‘fanbloodlytastic’.

Q7.

Word formation process	Example	Definition
Initialism	BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)	initial letter of each word forms a group of initials
Acronym	NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration)	a word formed by using the initial letter of other words
Collocation	‘tried and true’	a pairing or grouping of words which frequently go together

Neologism	'blog'	a new word or phrase coined in a language
Clipping	'brunch' (breakfast and lunch)	the shortening of two words then compounding them to form one word

Q8. Etymology is the origin of a word and the historical development of its meaning.

Example: gaffe (n.) – 'blunder', 1909, perhaps from French 'gaffe' meaning 'a clumsy remark'
It may derive from the British slang 'gaff', 'to cheat or trick', 1893

Q9.

Example	Name of open or closed class words	Purpose
'be', 'have', 'do'	auxiliary verbs	combined with various forms of main (or lexical) verbs to create various properties
'some', 'the', 'my'	determiners	used with nouns to indicate qualities such as possession or quantity
'up', 'on', 'over'	prepositions	shows the relationship between one noun and another, usually in relation to time and place
'heavy', 'important', 'blue'	adjectives	typically modify, or give more information about nouns
'sing', 'run', 'jump'	verbs	refer to actions (main or lexical)
'should', 'must', 'will'	modal verbs	allow us to vary or modify the meaning of a verb
'love', 'rock', 'sky'	nouns	lexemes that refer to things in the world around us