

Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

If you've enjoyed the activities in our event at the Northern Ireland Science Festival, you might like to try your hand at these additional problems:

1. We saw that by comparing languages, it is possible to reconstruct their relationships and histories. Here is a list of words and meanings from ten different languages:

| | | | |
|----------|------------------|---------|------------------|
| a. viu | 'living' | f. vif | 'lively, bright' |
| b. vivo | 'living, lively' | g. vivu | 'living' |
| c. vivo | 'living, lively' | h. cwic | 'quick' |
| d. kwiek | 'spry' | i. qius | 'living' |
| e. kvæg | 'livestock' | j. keck | 'cheeky' |

These languages can be divided into two subgroups in terms of how closely they are related. Starting at the top of the list, which languages should be in the first group?

2. All these words have the same origin, an adjective whose form was something like **gwihwos*. What do you think would be the most likely meaning for this word?
3. In Swahili, a single word can correspond to a whole sentence in English. Here is a list of Swahili words:

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| a. ninawaona | 'I see them' | e. tulimwuliza | 'We asked her' |
| b. aliniuliza | 'She asked me' | f. tuliwaona | 'We saw them' |
| c. nilimwona | 'I saw her' | g. wanatuuliza | 'They ask us' |
| d. anatuuliza | 'She asks us' | h. wananiona | 'They see me' |

Which parts of these words mean *I, me, she, her, we, us, they, them*?

4. Which parts mean *ask* and *see*?
5. How does Swahili show present and past tenses?
6. Dyirbal is an Aboriginal language spoken in Australia. Here are some sentences in Dyirbal:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| a. <i>Bangul buran balan</i> | 'He saw her' |
| b. <i>Bangun buran bayi</i> | 'She saw him' |
| c. <i>Bayi banagan^yu</i> | 'He returned' |
| d. <i>Balan banagan^yu</i> | 'She returned' |

Can you figure out the rule for when to use *bangul/bangun* and when to use *bayi/balan*? How is this different from when to use *he/she* and *him/her* in English?

(Hint: a verb like *see*, which has a subject and an object, is called 'transitive'. A verb like *return*, which has a subject but no object, is called 'intransitive'.)

Answers

1. a, b, c, f, g
2. Living
3. I: *ni*
me: *ni*
she: *a*
her: *mw*
we: *tu*
us: *tu*
they: *wa*
them: *wa*
4. ask: *uliza*
see: *ona*
5. present: *na*
past: *li*
6. *Bangul/bangun* are used only for the subjects of transitive verbs. *Bayi/balan* are used for the objects of transitive verbs and the subjects of intransitive verbs. In English, *he/she* are used for all subjects, of transitive and intransitive verbs; *him/her* are used only for objects.

Useful Links

- Language Awareness for Key Stage 3:
<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/topic/modern-languages-linguistics/quality/research-projects/lawks3/resources>
- MFL Mentoring:
<http://mflmentoring.co.uk>
- Linguistics in MFL
<https://www.cantab.net/users/jrkasstan/MFL/index.html>
- World of Languages/Languages of the World (WoLLoW)
<https://theworldoflanguages.co.uk>
- World Atlas of Language Structures:
<https://wals.info>
- UK Linguistics Olympiad:
<https://www.uklo.org>
- All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad:
<https://ailo.adaptcentre.ie>