

Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

1: Introducing Language Awareness

Key Terms	Optional Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sound• Meaning• Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phoneme

- Introduction: Learning about language
 - At school, each language is usually taught in its own separate class
 - In these lessons we will be looking at different languages at the same time
 - Some of these may be languages that you have never seen before
 - You won't need to know how to speak these languages
 - Instead, we'll provide enough information for you to understand what's going on
 - You may also know other languages besides the ones that we discuss here
 - If you do, you can think about how these languages are similar to/different from what we show
 - Reasons for looking at different languages:
 - Comparing languages lets us see what all languages have **in common**
 - Comparing languages also lets us see **how** and **why** languages differ
 - Understanding reasons for these differences can reveal the **patterns** that they form
 - The more you know about languages and their patterns, the **easier** it is **to learn them!**
 - For example, you might wonder why Irish sentences always start with a verb:
 - *Cheannaigh Máire leabhar*
'Mary *bought* a book'
 - You might wonder why Spanish has two definite articles, masculine *el* and feminine *la*, both meaning 'the'.
 - *el* hombre
'the man'
 - *la* mujer
'the woman'
 - You might wonder why French verbs have different endings that you can't even hear:
 - j'aime 'I love'
 - tu aimes 'you love'
 - il aime 'he loves'
 - ils aiment 'they love'
 - (all pronounced [ɛm])
- Learning a language
 - Babies begin learning a language soon after they are born
 - Just from listening to the people around them, they can learn everything they need to know to start speaking
- Sounds
 - One thing a baby needs to learn is what **sounds** a language has
 - Some sounds are very common and occur in thousands of languages around the world
 - One common sound is the vowel <oo>

- Others are very rare and found in only a few languages
 - The click sounds found in some African languages are quite rare
 - Another rare sound is the <th> in English *thing*
- Another important thing is to learn which differences between sounds are meaningful and which are not meaningful
 - In English, the vowel spelt with <i> in *click* is different from the vowel spelt with <i> in *clique*
 - In languages such as French and Spanish, these two sounds would seem like different forms of the same vowel
 - This is why someone speaking English with a French or Spanish accent might pronounce *click* and *clique* the same way
- There are also differences that aren't meaningful in English, but are meaningful in other languages
 - In English, vowel length on its own isn't important
 - For example, what we call 'long <o>' isn't just longer than 'short <o>'; it's also a different sound
 - You can hear this yourself by listening to words like *hop* and *hope*
 - In some languages, such as Greek, simply changing the length of time that you pronounce a vowel can change the meaning:
 - *ikánomen* (short)
'we are coming'
 - *īkánomen* (long)
'we were coming'
- For sounds that differ in a meaningful way, linguists use the term *phonemes*
- Meanings
 - Babies also have to learn that each word has a meaning
 - Some types of meaning are easy to learn
 - e.g. *cat*, *dog*, *run*, *swim*
 - But what about words like *I*?
 - *I* = 'mother' when mother is speaking
 - *I* = 'father' when father is speaking
 - And there are other words, like *the* and *oh*, which are much harder to define
 - However, children still manage to learn them correctly
 - Sometimes people mean more than just what they say
 - For example, someone might say *It's getting a bit cold in here* if they want you to shut the window
 - Part of knowing how to speak a language is learning to recognise these indirect meanings
- Grammar
 - Once you've learned the meanings of individual words, you still have to know how to combine them into a sentence
 - In some languages, such as German, the rules for how to do this are fairly complicated
 - *Ich sah es*
I saw it
'I saw it'
 - *Ich hatte es gesehen*
I had it seen
'I had seen it'

- *Ich dachte, dass er es gesehen hatte*
I thought that he it seen had
'I thought that he had seen it'

- As you'll see in the coming lessons, grammar involves much more than just the order of words
- Different ways of speaking
 - Speaking a language also involves knowing how to speak in different settings
 - For example, do you speak exactly the same way at home, at school, and with your friends?
 - If you or someone you know speaks more than one language, where is each language used?
- Language change
 - Babies are very good at learning to speak
 - However, sometimes they make mistakes
 - Sometimes these mistakes spread and become the new, normal way of speaking
 - The more obvious a mistake is, the more people are likely to make it
 - Some changes in language are fairly small
 - *a nadder* → *an adder*
 - Some changes get rid of irregularities
 - *one whall, two whales* → *one whale, two whales*
 - Other changes add new irregularities
 - *dig/digged* → *dig/dug*
(like *sting/stung*)
 - In the lessons to come, you'll see how, if enough changes happen, one language can split into two or even into dozens
- Studying a language
 - When you first encounter other languages, they often seem very different from English
 - Learners often find these differences off-putting and confusing
 - Breaking down these differences and understanding the reasons for them can help reduce confusion
 - This involves comparing languages consciously, rather than just trying to pick up patterns unconsciously
 - Even if you're not interested in learning another language, language awareness can still be useful
 - It can help you understand things you see happening in English
 - Most importantly, you'll see that language isn't just random
 - Studying patterns in language can help us to understand things that all languages have in common
 - It can show us that different languages can be more similar underneath than on the surface
 - Analysing these patterns is what people do in linguistics, the scientific study of language
- Conclusion
 - Babies are able to learn to speak instinctively
 - However, when they don't learn to speak quite like their parents, language can change
 - Learning a language involves mastering many different skills and concepts
 - The more you understand about the different aspects of language, the easier it is to learn one