

## The big idea: could the English language die?

### Level 3: Advanced

**Article summary:** This article explains how and why languages change over time and how the English language is also likely to change or possibly even die out altogether.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Skills:** Reading, Speaking, Writing

**Language focus:** Common expressions

**Materials needed:** One copy of the worksheet per student

#### Key:

1. *influx*
2. *susceptible*
3. *revert to*
4. *hapless*
5. *unintelligible*
6. *precedents*
7. *staggering*
8. *colloquialisms*
9. *dominion*
10. *nattering*
11. *conservative*
12. *shift*
13. *creole*
14. *component*
15. *subjects*
16. *migration*
17. *accelerated*
18. *loanwords*
19. *illiterate*
20. *unpredictability*

#### 1. Warmer

- a. This activity aims to get students thinking about the English language and how it may change over the next century. Encourage students to give reasons to explain their opinions and, where possible, to use examples. You can extend the activity by asking students to speculate about which other languages are likely to replace English in the future and why.

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences using words from the previous activity in the correct form.

#### 2. Key words

- a. Ask students to work individually to match the words in bold from the article to the correct definitions. Remind them to look at the different forms of any verbs (e.g. simple past, present continuous, etc.) in the definitions, as these will give them clues as to the form of the verb from the article. For an extra challenge, ask students to write down as many synonyms of the word *nattering* that they know (e.g. *gossiping*, *chatting*, *chattering*, *talking*, etc). Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class.

#### Key:

- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>unintelligible</i>  | 12. <i>conservative</i>     |
| 2. <i>illiterate</i>      | 13. <i>creole</i>           |
| 3. <i>loanwords</i>       | 14. <i>revert to</i>        |
| 4. <i>precedents</i>      | 15. <i>influx</i>           |
| 5. <i>shift</i>           | 16. <i>component</i>        |
| 6. <i>accelerated</i>     | 17. <i>susceptible</i>      |
| 7. <i>hapless</i>         | 18. <i>unpredictability</i> |
| 8. <i>migration</i>       | 19. <i>subjects</i>         |
| 9. <i>dominion</i>        | 20. <i>nattering</i>        |
| 10. <i>staggering</i>     |                             |
| 11. <i>colloquialisms</i> |                             |

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#### 3. Comprehension check

- a. Students can work individually or in pairs to do this activity. Encourage them to highlight the section in the article where they found the answers to the questions. You might like to ask students to rewrite the false answers.

**Key:**

1. Not Mentioned
2. True
3. True
4. False – *The Egyptian language survived the arrival of the Greeks, the Romans and Christianity, but not that of Arabic and Islam in the seventh century AD. No one quite knows why.*
5. False – *Both Latin and Egyptian were spoken for more than 2,000 years; English has been going strong for about 1,500.*
6. Not Mentioned
7. True
8. True

#### 4. Key language

- a. Students work individually to find the phrases in the article and match them to the correct definition. You might like to do this as a timed activity to practice students' ability to find keywords in a text quickly (scanning).

**Key:**

1. *stem the flow*
2. *uncharted territory*
3. *lingua franca*
4. *common standards*
5. *pearls of wisdom*
6. *guiding principles*

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences with the words from the previous activity in the correct form. To extend the activity, ask students to work in pairs to write example sentences of their own using the phrases.

**Key:**

1. *uncharted territory*
2. *lingua franca*
3. *stem the flow*
4. *common standards*
5. *pearls of wisdom*
6. *guiding principles*

#### 5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Ask them to justify their opinions, referring to their own experiences whenever possible.

#### 6. In your own words

- a. The aim of this task is to get students to think about how English vocabulary could change in 100 years, depending on the impact of different factors such as technology, migration or social change. Put students into small groups and give them some time to brainstorm where they think new words could come from. Then ask them to produce six dictionary entries for the new words, providing a definition and example.
- b. Students can present some of their words to the rest of the class. They can then choose the words that they think are most likely to be in use in English in 100 years.