

4th Year Practical English Exam

Module 1: Reading Comprehension

Sample paper

Duration: 75 minutes

Part 1

You are going to read three extracts which are all concerned in some way with language. For questions 1 – 10, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Why scientists keep it obscure

Technical language, in craft and science, exists for two purposes. One is to allow specialists to talk with ease about things for which common parlance has no terms. The other is to bamboozle the uninitiated into thinking there's more to the subject than there really is. What professional body does not use this technique to impress upon the government and the public how essential their mysterious abilities are? What hapless academics do not cram the latest buzzwords into their dead-duck research proposals in a (not always) vain attempt to breathe a semblance of life into grant applications? What, after all, are scientists but professional men and women who, in the words of John Galloway are merely 'trying to get on'? The mystique of science serves some very important ends which it may not be in their interests to dispel.

line 6

As convenor of a conference, I once had a 150-word abstract sent to me. Despite being myself a specialist in the subject, I was unable to understand anything of the paper being described. Yet the sentences were correctly constructed, and gave a semblance of logic. The problem was vocab.

line 16

line 17

I wrestled with it for a whole day. Eventually, by combining references on related topics in American journals, and by examining some outdated glossaries, I worked out the main thrust of the implications in this great work. If I mentioned them by name, perhaps a non-linguist would not see the sense of it. But the contention turned out to be no more complex (and not a lot more significant) than 'some oranges have pips'. Put like that, indeed, a little short on mystique. But then, great thoughts, simply expressed, do have the beauty of simplicity.

- Technical language enables those who use it to
 - avoid slang and vulgar expressions.
 - explain complicated ideas to ordinary people with more precision.
 - pretend their speciality is too complex for others to understand.
 - show the public how sophisticated their speciality is.
- What is the significance of '(not always)' (line 6)?
 - Academics are sometimes quite modest.
 - Academics may not want their proposals to be accepted.
 - Obtaining a grant may not be academics' real aim.
 - Academics' use of jargon is sometimes successful.
- After studying the abstract, the writer
 - got the general idea in the end.
 - finally realised that it was, in fact, meaningless.
 - was still not sure whether he had got the gist or not.
 - at last understood the details.
- By using the phrase 'some oranges have pips' (lines 16-17) to summarise the major contention of the abstract, the author is suggesting that
 - the language used by the abstract author suited the content of his message.
 - the author of the abstract had a vested interest in using obscure language.
 - the points the abstract made were in fact quite obvious.
 - the author of the abstract was inept at writing a piece of academic discourse.

Colour terminology

line 4 In the field of colour terminology, the study by Berlin and Kay *Basic Color Terms* was based on a comparison of almost a hundred languages. Berlin and Kay's book was remarkable not only for its coverage of data from a wide range of diverse languages, but also for the surprising claim it made for universalism on a terrain previously regarded as a happy hunting-ground for relativist semantics. It has, in the past, seemed almost too easy to show that the systems of colour terminology of different languages differ widely and unpredictably in the way they cut up the 'continuum of colour'. Yet from the unpromising diversity of material from every major part of the world, Berlin and Kay arrived at the bold hypothesis that there is a universal set of exactly eleven colour categories, from which each language takes a subset.

The claim of Berlin and Kay was an unusually precise one: not only did they say there are eleven basic categories, but that these categories are ordered (or in strict mathematical terms, partially ordered) as shown:

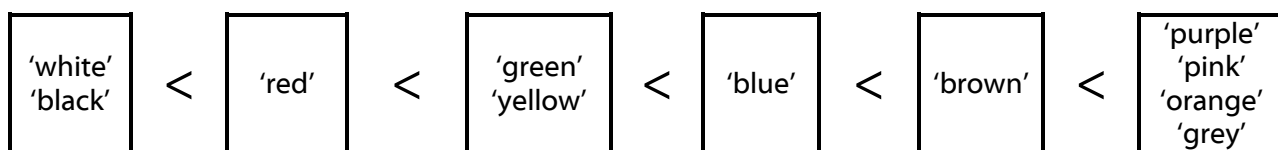


Diagram 1

The ordering relation indicated by the symbol < is explained as follows: for any two colour categories [x] and [y], [x] < [y] means that if a language contains y, it must also contain x.

/adapted from *Semantics* by Geoffrey Leech/

5. One of the principal claims made in Berlin and Kay's study is that
 - A no language recognizes more than eleven colours.
 - B there are eleven universal basic colour terms.
 - C people do not perceive more than eleven colours.
 - D all languages make use of at least eleven colour terms.

6. The phrase 'happy hunting-ground' (*line 4*) implies that relativist semantics
 - A did not consider the systems of colour terminology a worthy topic of investigation.
 - B provided the systems of colour terminology as solid evidence of lack of universalism.
 - C used the systems of colour terminology to invalidate Berlin and Kay's findings.
 - D treated the systems of colour terminology as a source of data for the majority of its theories.

7. The scheme in Diagram 1
 - A shows the order in which colour terms are acquired by speakers of various languages.
 - B presents a sequence of colour terms present in all languages.
 - C shows that speakers use colour terms for 'white' and 'black' more often than other colour terms.
 - D predicts that if a language has a colour term for 'blue', it must also have a term for 'red'.

A note about the use of names

Standard dictionaries spell the names of all birds from auks to whippoorwills with lower-case letters, while the America Ornithologists' Union (AOU), an authority scientists and serious birdwatchers follow, requires that bird names be capitalised.

There are good reasons behind the AOU's policy. Many bird names include words that describe salient features of that species - the yellow warbler, for example. When the name is spelled in lower-case letters, the reader cannot be sure whether it refers to a specific warbler of the species *Dendroica petechia* or an unidentified little bird that happens to be yellow. Calling it a Yellow Warbler solves the problem.

line 10 Yet it's hard to read a story when each page is interrupted by great numbers of capitalised words. For this reason (with apologies to the AOU and to punctilious birdwatchers), I decided to go with the dictionary. Whenever confusion threatens as a result of lower-case spelling (as in the story of the grey gull on page 174), I throw in the bird's taxonomic designation to make my meaning clear.

8. What point is illustrated by the example of the yellow warbler?
- A the need for flexibility in spelling rules
 - B the fundamental flaw in the AOU's policy
 - C the need to use technical rather than common names
 - D the inherent confusion present in certain bird names
9. The word 'punctilious' in the passage (*line 10*) is closest in meaning to
- A nonplussed.
 - B genuine.
 - C scrupulous.
 - D baffled.
10. In this text, the writer's purpose is to
- A justify an approach.
 - B expose a contradiction.
 - C excuse a presumption.
 - D clarify a misunderstanding.

Part 2

You are going to read an extract from an article about different family structures. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A – H** the one which fits each gap (**11 – 17**). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Britain divided

A massive social experiment has been carried out in Britain and America in the last 30-odd years. The values of the 1960's generation have dominated the evolution of family structures. Personal fulfilment has been elevated over old-fashioned concepts of duty and commitment. Divorce rates have soared and lone-parent households have proliferated.

11

The marriage sceptics have held almost all of the intellectual and political high ground since the 1960's. For them, family structure is simply one more aspect of 'lifestyle choice', and marriage holds no particular status. But differences of opinion are starting to emerge. A government discussion document on the family was due to be published early this year. But owing to disagreement it has been shelved until after the election.

12

A simple analogy shows very clearly why this has to be done. Driving with a safety belt does not guarantee protection in the event of an accident and in some cases may even be a disadvantage because it may trap the driver inside the car. But usually it is safer to drive wearing a safety belt than not.

13

It is now clear that children brought up in a stable, two-parent family as a rule do better than in other family types. Family break-up often damages children, even when it makes one or both of their parents happier. And this is true for almost every indicator used to measure their personal development.

14

Marriages are generally more stable than cohabiting unions. This applies whether or not children are present. The instability of cohabiting unions is to be expected since many of them involve no lifelong commitment and the option of breaking up is consciously preserved. Marriage is also far more

likely to create networks of reciprocal obligations between generations, siblings and spouses.

15

Although divorce can be beneficial to children in the case of severe parental conflict, it frequently damages children emotionally and harms their future life chances. The conventional view at one time was that parents should normally stick together for the sake of the children, even if one or both of them was unhappy. For decades this view was criticised by therapeutic professionals who claimed that children are better off if unhappy parents separate.

16

None of this implies a holier-than-thou morality. What goes on behind the net curtains to preserve marriage is not our concern. Support for marriage is based on its practical benefits to both individuals and society. Nor does it imply turning back the clock to the Victorian patriarchs. Relationships within marriage have altered – for the better.

17

What is needed is a series of measures, each fairly minor in its own way, to nudge the system of family structure back towards a 'tipping point', where the popularity and stability of marriage once again becomes self-reinforcing. Small changes in themselves may seem insignificant, but the Long March begins with the first small step.

- A** Other examples spring readily to mind. The common theme is that, most of the time, the outcomes are happy ones. But the probability of an unhappy one rises in certain circumstances. This is exactly the case with family structure. Marriage remains a valuable institution, for the individuals concerned, for their children, and for society as a whole. The empirical evidence is now overwhelmingly in support of all three of these propositions.
- B** The consequences of these trends are now being evaluated. As with any major social issue, people and political parties are divided in their convictions but serious social science research, dominated in this area by the Americans, is giving the thumbs down to the experiment.
- C** The various findings obviously refer to averages and may not apply in individual cases. Thus, some cohabiting unions are very successful, and many lone parent and step-families bring up their children well. But despite these caveats, the scientific evidence that marriage as an institution is superior to other family types is now overwhelming.
- D** Much of the discussion in Britain has been dominated by emotion rather than by evidence. Most children, whatever their family background, grow up as well-adjusted members of society. Everyone can point to lone parents or cohabiting couples who have charming and successful children. But it is just not good enough to point to individual examples. To put together a serious argument, we need to look at how the outcomes of different family structures compare on average, across lots of individual cases.
- E** The changed role of women in the labour market, for example, has far more implications for personal relationships within marriage than it does for the institution itself. Labour market changes have happened in all Western European countries, yet divorce rates there are much lower than in the UK.
- F** In a recently published EU survey, 65% of the first-time married couples who took part admitted to already having seriously contemplated seeking a divorce. Though not surprising, this is a most worrying statistics.
- G** The so-called experts also ignore the debilitating impact marriage break-up has on family finances. Lone parenthood is a powerful case of poverty. The stereotype, of course, is the 19-year-old semi-literate mother of two children by separate fathers living in a tower block. Most lone parents are not of this type, but it is, nevertheless, universally true that lone parenthood greatly increases the chances of a family ending up in poverty.
- H** In terms of achievement and emotional condition, children living with their married parents usually fare far better than other children – and this applies to both adopted and biological children. Physical abuse is also much less frequent for children who live with their married, biological parents and members of stable families suffer from less anxiety, depression, and other mental ailments – and these findings apply to both sexes.

Part 3

You are going to read an extract from a novel. For questions **18 – 25**, choose the answer (**A, B, C** or **D**) which you think fits best according to the text. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

We are talking Big Boots here. Really BIGTIME Boots.

line 3

I stood in my 800-dollar-each designer-label cowboy boots on the rocks of an old formation in the Arizona desert sand. Money no object. I wore the whole truly cowboy outfit and if *you* had the outfit you might be a cowboy. But I was not. It wasn't working. I squinted into the morning sun looking out at the Arizona mountains and I had to admit, I was not at home on the range.

Flying in from Denver just after dawn, I had the feeling that I just might pass for an ol' cowhand coming in from the sky. The feeling didn't last past the first real cowboy in the luggage hall of Phoenix airport. He was wearing a sweat-stained T-shirt, needed a shave, and was hoisting a dirty canvass bag off the conveyer belt when he caught sight of my brand new cowboy boots. He slowly raised one eyebrow and moved off out of the door without looking back.

line 16

There ought to be, somewhere, hanging in a closet, a suit of clothes an ex-racing driver can put on without feeling like he is from another planet. Something he could wear so that wherever he goes he doesn't get the feeling that everybody is talking another language and doing whatever they do at half speed. I liked, no, not liked... I flatout *loved* being a racing driver, driving racing cars. I am addicted to it and it is all I know how to do. But I don't do it any more. I couldn't if I wanted to. Question is, I thought, looking into the mean, rust-coloured rock of the mountains in the distance, what do I do now?

line 20

A racing driver should have one or two fall-back identities lined up for when he climbs out of his car. I thought I did, but when I reached for them, they just disappeared. How about: an ex-racing driver adds colour to the commentary direct from the trackside? 'We got fifteen guys, all of them former Indy and Formula One drivers, fifteen guys in front of you, Forrest, standing in line to be colour commentators. We'll call you.'

Well then, how about: an ex-racing driver joins a partnership to sell classic cars? That lasted nearly all winter with phone calls, lunches, lawyers and meetings with bankers. But it was the year nobody was buying old Ferraris and Honda was 'reviewing' its dealer list. So in the end I gracefully withdrew before there was nothing to withdraw from. Being an 'ex' anything is depressing work. I mean you tell me; how badly do you want to hear about how I was almost the World Champion? Nobody wants to hear a story that ends in 'almost'. And even if I had been world champion you could probably just about stand to listen to the story for five minutes before your ears turned to cement. Last year's champion was last year.

line 40

line 41

Not that I want sympathy. Which is just as well, since I don't get any. Well, why should I? I had a good run, made money and hung on to enough. But oh, man, I miss the heat of slipping into that graceful, elegant, shrink-wrapped super-tech machine with seven hundred horsepower behind my neck. Zero to a hundred and fifty miles an hour in 4.9 seconds. And yes, I miss coming within an eyelash of killing myself every race or so. I miss the bright and gorgeous people and the reporters who acted as if what I said mattered. Being famous, even in a minor way, isn't all bad. Businessmen and politicians bragged to their friends that they knew me. Little boys slid under fences to get my autograph. And now that I don't drive a racing car... Only last week the phone rang twice. I have time in the morning and I have time in the afternoon. And let me just check, but I think tomorrow is free. So much empty time.

I looked up into the soft blue morning sky. No buzzards overhead. Maybe Arizona doesn't have buzzards. But a couple of little brown birds in a saguaro cactus just in front of me were giving me advice; something like 'get away from our nest before we sing our hearts out'. It had never occurred to me that the desert had songbirds. It did occur to me that a bogus cowboy in designer boots had a lot to learn.

18. How did the cowboy at Phoenix airport react to the narrator's appearance?
- A He was shocked.
 - B He was unimpressed.
 - C He was angered.
 - D He was disturbed.
19. According to the narrator, ex-racing drivers in the company of others feel a sense of
- A superiority.
 - B pride.
 - C alienation.
 - D failure.
20. The narrator did not get the first new job he tried for because
- A he was not so well qualified as others.
 - B his contacts had misinformed him.
 - C he applied at short notice.
 - D his experience was not unique.
21. Why did the narrator give up selling cars?
- A He could see the future of the operation was bleak.
 - B He did not enjoy the constant entertaining involved.
 - C He felt unequal to the demands of the job.
 - D He did not feel comfortable as a salesman.
22. When the narrator was a racing driver, he
- A enjoyed having his opinions respected.
 - B was embarrassed by the attention he received.
 - C used his position to make influential contacts.
 - D had occasional fears for his personal safety.
23. What impression does the narrator try to create by using the phrase 'And let me just check' in the penultimate paragraph (*lines 40-41*)?
- A that he regrets finishing as a racing driver
 - B that he is not open to new opportunities
 - C that he has a busy schedule
 - D that he is not enjoying life
24. Which of the following expressions may be said to be an example of self-irony on the narrator's part?
- A 'Money no object.' (*line 3*)
 - B '...it is all I know how to do' (*line 16*)
 - C 'I thought I did' (*line 20*)
 - D '...I think tomorrow is free' (*line 41*)
25. As he looked at the birds on the cactus, the narrator
- A came to terms with his new life.
 - B realised the extent of his ignorance.
 - C felt apprehensive about making a new start.
 - D decided this was not the place for him.