

LINGUISTICS WITH DR JENNY CULBERTSON

TALKING POINTS

KNOWLEDGE

1. Roughly how many languages are spoken in the world today?
2. What is a universal learning bias in linguistics?
3. What is word order? Can you think of any other rules English has for how words are ordered?

COMPREHENSION

4. Why do some languages not have words for 'north' or 'south'?

APPLICATION

5. Why do linguists like Jenny not think that linguistic patterns are only linked to cultural backgrounds?
6. Take the English phrase 'fifteen yellow guitars.' How would these three words be ordered in Thai, Basque and Kiitharaka?

ANALYSIS

7. How can artificial languages help linguists find evidence for universal learning biases?
8. What do monkey calls have in common with human words and how are they different? What about birdsong?

EVALUATION

9. What can the development of new sign languages tell us about the evolution of language in general?

ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO AT HOME OR IN THE CLASSROOM

CREATE A LANGUAGE!

- In pairs, think of three animals and three emotions.
- Now, on your own, make up a new language containing these six words, as well as the numbers 1-3.
- Can you make your words sound like possible new English words?
- Your language can have the sentence structure of either English, Thai, Basque or Kiitharaka.
- Construct sentences in your new language, using your nine new words and your chosen sentence structure (e.g. how would you say 'three happy rabbits' in your new language?).
- Compare your new language to your partner's, then translate two phrases from their language into your own.

MORE RESOURCES

- The University of Edinburgh's Centre for Language Evolution is a good place to start. Read up on the Centre's research (www.lel.ed.ac.uk/cle/index.php/research) or follow the team on twitter (#UoE_CLE). This is a great way to get information about the Centre's activities, including its public talks series 'Edinburgh Lectures in Language Evolution'.

You can also participate in the Centre's research! Get in touch and a member of the team can tell you about the experiments they have going: cle@ed.ac.uk

- Check out linguist Gretchen McCullough's blog All Things Linguistic (allthingslinguistic.com), and her podcast Lingthusiasm. Gretchen studies language on the internet, and her blog and podcast cover a really diverse range of topics in linguistics.