Talking about language

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 lingua franca ____	**a** a common language used for communication between speakers of different native languages
2 vernacular ____	**b** the everyday, informal language spoken by ordinary people in a region
3 linguistic relativity ____	**c** the theory that the structure of a language shapes how its speakers perceive the world
4 language attrition ____	**d** the gradual loss of proficiency in a language, often through disuse
5 sociolect ____	**e** a variety of language associated with a particular social group or class
6 pidgin ____	**f** a simplified language developed for communication between groups without a shared language
7 diglossia ____	**g** the use of two distinct language varieties within a community, each for different social purposes
8 phonetic ____	**h** relating to the sounds of speech
9 syntax ____	**i** the arrangement of words to form grammatically correct sentences
10 semantic ____	**j** relating to meaning in language

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For a common language between different native speakers: lingua franca / a single native tongue.

2 For everyday, informal spoken language: vernacular / formal register.

3 For the theory that language shapes thought: linguistic relativity / universal grammar.

4 For gradually losing fluency through disuse: language attrition / steady improvement.

5 For language use associated with social class: sociolect / a random accent.

6 For using two language varieties for different purposes: diglossia / monolingualism.

7 For the arrangement of words into sentences: syntax / vocabulary.

8 For relating to meaning: semantic / purely phonetic.

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3 **Complete the linguistics collocations with one word.**

1 a common _____ franca (= shared communication language)

2 the local _____ (= everyday spoken language)

3 language _____ (= gradual loss of fluency)

4 a distinct _____ (= social-group language variety)

5 _____ change (= shift in meaning over time)

6 _____ structure (= sentence word order and rules)

7 native _____ (= a first-language speaker)

8 _____ relativity (= theory that language shapes thought)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

diglossia | language attrition | lingua franca | linguistic relativity | phonetic | pidgin | semantic | sociolect | syntax | vernacular

Case A: English functions as a 1 _____ across much international business, despite being no one's mother tongue in many meetings.
Case B: Researchers documented significant 2 _____ among heritage speakers who rarely used their first language after emigrating.
Case C: The community exhibits 3 _____, using the formal national language at school and the local 4 _____ at home.
Case D: Traders developed a simple 5 _____ to communicate across language barriers, blending elements from several source languages.
Case E: Linguists studying a particular 6 _____ noted distinctive vocabulary associated with a specific social group.
Case F: The debate over 7 _____ continues, with some scholars arguing language shapes perception more than others believe.
Case G: The analysis considered both 8 _____ features, relating to sound, and 9 _____ ones, relating to meaning, alongside underlying 10 _____ patterns.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Does language shape thought?

The theory of linguistic relativity, sometimes called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, proposes that the structure of a language influences how its speakers perceive and categorise the world. Strong versions of this claim, suggesting language rigidly determines thought, have been largely discredited, but weaker versions, proposing that language subtly influences habitual patterns of attention, retain considerable support among linguists. Studies of languages with distinctive grammatical features, such as those requiring speakers to specify spatial direction constantly, have found measurable differences in how speakers navigate and remember spatial relationships compared with speakers of languages lacking such requirements, lending some empirical support to moderate versions of the theory.

1 What does the theory of linguistic relativity propose? _____

2 What has happened to strong versions of this claim? _____

3 What do weaker versions propose instead? _____

4 What kind of languages have researchers studied to test this? _____

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5 What have studies found about speakers of such languages? _____

6 What does this lend support to? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

1 English is used as a shared language in international business. LINGUA FRANCA _____

2 He gradually lost fluency in his first language. LANGUAGE ATTRITION _____

3 The community uses two distinct language varieties for different purposes. DIGLOSSIA _____

4 The theory suggests language shapes how people think. LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing whether language shapes thought, distinguishing observation from theoretical claim.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 lingua franca 2 vernacular 3 linguistic relativity 4 language attrition 5 sociolect 6 diglossia 7 syntax 8 semantic

3 Collocations

1 lingua 2 vernacular 3 attrition 4 sociolect 5 semantic 6 syntax/syntactic 7 speaker 8 linguistic

4 Case notes

1 lingua franca 2 language attrition 3 diglossia 4 vernacular 5 pidgin 6 sociolect
7 linguistic relativity 8 phonetic 9 semantic 10 syntax

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 That the structure of a language influences how its speakers perceive and categorise the world.
2 They have been largely discredited.
3 That language subtly influences habitual patterns of attention.
4 Languages with distinctive grammatical features, such as those requiring speakers to specify spatial direction constantly.
5 Measurable differences in how speakers navigate and remember spatial relationships.
6 Moderate versions of the theory.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 English is used as a lingua franca. 2 He experienced language attrition.
3 The community exhibits diglossia. 4 The theory of linguistic relativity suggests this.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.