Test your knowledge – Quiz

1. Chinese and Japanese are related languages.

2. There are five vowel sounds in English.

3. Educated people speak more grammatically than do uneducated people.

4. Linguists are people who speak many languages.

5. The languages of ‘primitive’ people have simpler grammars than do languages such as English.
**Test your knowledge – Quiz**

1. All languages in the world have nouns and verbs.

2. We should say ‘It’s I’ rather than ‘It’s me.’

3. A language which has never been written is not really a language.

4. As a language is passed on from one generation to the next, it tends to get corrupted.
Test your knowledge – Quiz

1. English is a simpler language than Latin or Greek.

2. Spoken language is a degenerate form of language; real language is what is written.

3. It’s easier to learn Cantonese if your ethnic roots are in Hong Kong.

4. It’s natural to start a sentence with the subject and follow it with the verb.
Test your knowledge – Quiz

1. How many languages are there in the world?
   a. 100
   b. 500
   c. 1000
   d. more than 2000

2. Which two languages are most closely related?
   a. English and Yiddish
   b. Chinese and Japanese
   c. Yiddish and Hebrew
   d. English and French
Languages

- How many languages are there in the world?
  - Atlas 6000
  - Comrie 4000
Why is this question impossible to answer?
Why is this impossible to answer?

1. Many parts of the world are not well studied
   - New Guinea only recently studied
   • contains $\frac{1}{5}$th of the world’s languages
Why is this impossible to answer?

- Many parts of the world are still not studied
  - there are still other remote areas
Why is this impossible to answer?

1. Difficult to distinguish between a dialect and a language
   – decision is often made on social-political grounds
• European language divisions based on social factors

• German/Dutch

• Which country is dominant?
Why is this impossible to answer?

1. Difficult to distinguish between a dialect and a language
   - “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.”
   - what does this mean?
Why is this impossible to answer?

- Linguistic criterion:
  - mutual intelligibility
  - if they are mutually intelligible → dialects of the same language
  - if they are not → different languages
Why is this impossible to answer?

- So...
  - American English and British English?
  - High German and Low German?
  - German and Dutch?
Why is this impossible to answer?

- (Dis)advantages
  1. Chinese ‘languages’ rather than Chinese dialects
     - Cantonese and Mandarin are not mutually intelligible
  2. Swedish, Norwegian and Danish...?
Swedish, Norwegian and Danish
turn out to be dialects
Difficult to distinguish between language and dialects

1. contradictory results:
   – dialect chain

\[ A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \]

but

\[ \bar{A} \quad \bar{D} \]
Difficult to distinguish between language and dialects
Difficult to distinguish between language and dialects

1. Notion of mutual intelligibility is also a matter of degree
   - Intelligibility increases with familiarity
   - Easier to understand when you want to understand
Why is this question impossible to answer?

1. Language change
   - Where do we draw the line?
   - Latin → French, Italian
     • considered different languages
   - Ancient Greek → Modern Greek
     • considered stages of the same language
   - Old English → Modern English vs.
   - Anglo-Saxon → English
Why is this question impossible to answer?

1. Many languages are on the verge of extinction
   - there are only a handful of these speakers, in old age
   - Ainu
   - ½ the world’s languages will become extinct in the next 100 years
Which languages have the most speakers?

- Chinese 1000 (in millions)
- English 350
- Spanish 250
- Hindi 200
- Japanese 120
- Korean 60
What does it mean to say that two languages belong to the same language family?
Same Language Family

- English and German vs.
- English and Russian
Same Language Family

- Share a set of features
  - Attributed to a common ancestor
    - English man man’s
    - German Mann Manns
  - hypothesis:
    - had a common ancestor
Germanic Language Family

- Germanic
  - English
  - German
  - Icelandic