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How linguistically prejudiced are you? How prejudiced are you linguistically?

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STAFF EDUCATION PROGRAM ☐ OR STAFF EDUCATION PROGRAMME ☐
TEST YOURSELF SECTION ☐ OR TEST-YOURSELF SECTION ☐

HOW LINGUISTICALLY PREJUDICED ARE YOU? ☐
HOW PREJUDICED ARE YOU LINGUISTICALLY? ☐

Record your responses by means of placing a tick (✓) in the blocks provided all over the place.
With which of the following statements do you agree? ☐
Which of the following statements do you agree with? ☐

1. Marlon Brando speaking ☐ mumbling lines from Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar in his American accent spoils the play. ☐
2. The radio-announcer with the best accent is :
   Kim Shippey ☐
   Michael de Morgan ☐
   Charles Fortune ☐
   John Berks ☐
   Or does Gary Player/Sol Kerzner speak better than any one of them? ☐
3. I did not ☐ didn't ☐ pick John Berks in 2 (above) because he uses too much slang. Agree ☐ Disagree ☐
4. Generally South Africans do not speak a very good English. ☐
5. A return to the teaching of formal grammar in our schools would help our children to speak and write more clearly. ☐
6. Children should be encouraged to answer in full sentences. ☐
7. Many children (particularly in areas other than our own) are not taught to speak correctly at home and need to be taught to do so at school. ☐
8. Pupils should do corrections after their work has been marked. ☐
9. The "free-expression" method in English over the last decade or so has been the major cause of the deterioration of written English. ☐
10. We who use and will go on increasingly using audio-visual aids, multiple-choice tests and other handy instruments have had nothing whatsoever to do with the decline in the standard of written work. ☐

One can go on and on.
If, at any stage, you felt tempted to place a tick (✓) anywhere you may be in need of help. Don't allow your pencils to get the better of your judgment ☐ judgement. ☐

One needs, I think, to be flexible and to grant to the term "language" a flexibility. Too often the word "language" is used as if the users knew exactly what was meant by it and expected everybody else to know too. Even at an institution like J.C.E. the word "language" has been built into slogans with vague or no useful meaning. (Always the case with slogans). I am thinking of such silly expressions as "every lesson is a language lesson" or "Every teacher is a language teacher". Ever since Bullock had his say on that other tricky phrase "Language across the curriculum" has everybody known what it means. It is bandied about with gay and promiscuous abandon.
Defining the word "language" or attempting to set down on paper once and for all its "meaning" is futile. Other terms often treated as if everybody knows their meanings are terms used in questions 1 to 10 above - terms like "best accent", "slang", "good English", "formal grammar", "full sentences", "speak correctly" and so on. All these terms when they are used in serious conversation, such as one hopes takes place at J.C.E., ought to have their meanings negotiated amongst participants in the conversation. We ought to do this but often we don't. We simply reveal our prejudices. For instance, blocks 1 and 2 above are indicators of the respondents' attitudes towards fashion, and may even indicate deeper-seated prejudices. One may mistakenly assume "program" to be "American" or to be a borrowing from some less statusful but nevertheless common language here in South Africa. Well, which is it? Or worse - is it both? ☐
Another forinstance ☐ is the problem of hyphenation. (Blocks 3 and 4). How well are we all coping with the changes brought about by machines? How are all the machines in the English-speaking world which are responsible for the vast mass of wordage produced daily, programmed to handle the little old hyphen? And are the machines right? ☐

Blocks 5 and 6 confront us with the problem of adverb placement. There are no hard and fast "rules" to follow. There are conventions yes, but Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) describe the positioning of adverbs in terms such as "normal order", "a tendency to follow", or "it is not usual... but sometimes..." (p.241)

I said earlier that the meanings of terms such as "language" or "grammar", or "language problem" need to be negotiated if any useful discussion is going to take place. And this brings me to the argument that underlies this bit of polemic. If "language" is so flexible a concept, does it mean that in its use, anything goes? The answer to this is obviously a loud "NO!" Competent users are AWARE of its flexibility and its precision. They know that given certain times and topics, different people, places and purposes etc. it is used (it sometimes uses us) flexibly and at the same time very precisely. It is this seeming paradox that sometimes gets us confused. And confusion very easily becomes prejudice.

REFERENCE

Quirk, R. and Greenbaum, S. (1973). A University Grammar of English Longman.

NOTE: Some of the questions posed are derived from The Open University Course Book Language Block!