

Samples of Varieties and Dialects of the English Language

Examine the following texts very carefully and then answer the following questions about each text. Please underline the words and phrases representative of the different types of language. Then try to paraphrase the underlined words and expressions.

- a. Is the language used formal or informal?
- b. Is the variety of the language American or British?
- c. Is the language variety used standard or nonstandard?
- d. Is the language variety used a regional dialect?
- e. Is the language variety used a prestige dialect?
- f. Is the language variety used a sociolect?
- g. Is the language variety used an idiolect?
- h. Is the language variety used a literary dialect?
- i. Does the text contain jargon?
- j. Does the text contain slang?
- k. Does the text contain argot?
- l. Does the text contain metaphors?
- m. Does the text contain idioms?
- n. Does the text contain proverbs and sayings?
- o. Does the text contain euphemisms?
- p. Does the text contain taboo words?

TEXT A:

The University of Kansas, by authority of the Board of Regents of the State of Kansas and upon the recommendation of the Faculty of the Graduate School, confers upon Argenis Arturo Zapata Becerra the degree of Master of Arts, Linguistics, with all its rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Given under the seal of the University of Kansas this fourteenth day of October, nineteen hundred and eighty-five.

TEXT B:¹

I looked at her, hoping she would break into the smile I knew she was suppressing.

"C'mon, Jenny!" I pleaded.

"I'm leaving. Good-bye," she said, and jumped immediately into the water. I dove right in after her and the next thing I knew we were both hanging on to the side of the boat and giggling.

"Hey," I said in one of my wittier observations, "you went overboard for me."

"Don't be too cocky," she replied. "Third is still only third."

"Hey, listen, you bitch," I said.

"What, you bastard?" she replied.

"I owe you a helluva lot," I said sincerely.

"Not true, you bastard, not true," she answered. "Not true?" I inquired, somewhat surprised. "You owe me everything," she said.

That night we blew twenty-three bucks on a lobster dinner at a fancy place in Yarmouth. Jenny was still reserving judgment until she could check out the two gentlemen who had, as she put it, "defeated me."

¹ Taken from Segal, E. (1970). *Love story*. New York: The New American Library; p. 94.

TEXT C:²

Long, long ago, in the very distant past, the great land of China was ruled by a magnificent Emperor who lived in the most gorgeous palace in the world. It was built entirely of fine porcelain, and was so delicate that all the servants and courtiers had to be very, very careful not to break any part of it!

The gardens were full of the most beautiful flowers. Tied to many of them were little glass and silver bells which tinkled all the time in the breeze, and the flowers spread the most wonderful perfume throughout the great palace.

TEXT D:

Under the hood, the Xbox 360 is a formidable piece of hardware. In addition to an IBM PowerPC-based CPU running at 3.2GHz and half a gigabyte of RAM, the 360 sports a customized ATI graphics processor capable of advanced antialiasing and shader effects. What that technical jargon means, in practice, is that new Xbox will have the processing power to deliver true 720p and 1080i wide-screen HDTV images for *all* of its games (by contrast, most games for the original Xbox maxed out at a DVD-level 480p). Multichannel surround sound is also standard, and the 360 natively supports up to four wireless controllers to cut down on cable clutter.

² Taken from: My book of favorite fairytales. New York: Exeter Books; p. 18.

TEXT E:

Dream
by Alexis West

Take a star from the sky
And buy a lovely dream
Thank the moon with a kiss
And sleep beneath its beam

Ride upon the waterfall
That takes you to that place
Where all your dreams come true
And your life is filled with grace

TEXT F:

An old lady was standing at the railing of the cruise ship holding her hat on tightly so that it would not blow off in the wind. A gentleman approached her and said: "Pardon me, madam. I do not intend to be forward, but did you know that your dress is blowing up in this high wind?"

"Yes, I know." said the lady, "I need both hands to hold onto this hat."

"But, madam, you must know that your privates are exposed!" said the gentleman in earnest.

The woman looked down, then back up at the man and replied, "Sir, anything you see down there is 85 years old. I just bought this hat yesterday"

TEXT G:

What's a Doohickey?

Sometimes, Americans have little mental pauses, where something's right on the tip of our tongue, but we can't think of the exact word-or when we want to euphemise unseemly speech. Fortunately, there's a way around this that doesn't involve brain surgery or duct tape. We use substitution words that can mean anything and everything. Here's an ode to mental vacuity.

Substitution Words

I was rooting willy-nilly through a buncha stuff, looking every whichway for the dinky little whatchamacallit to fix the goldong thingamajig, but good of whatsizname had put it in the hooziwhatsit, as usual! Boy oh boy, what a load of hooey. Always the same old rigamarole with that cockamamie bozo. He's such a pipsqueak! If I found it, ka-ching, I'd be rich, which would be just jim dandy! I'd be totally discombobulated. You-knowwho had done you-know-what with the goofy little gadget again, so whaddyaknow ... there was something-or-other wrong with it. What a snafu! I had a heck of a time getting ahold of whatsername to come over and take care of it with her special little doohickey that she keeps there in the thingamabob. For the gazillionth time, the flightly little flibbertigibbit said alrighty, she wouldn't shilly shally, she'd schlep over with her widget fixer and whatnot to do a bodaciously whizbang job on the whole shebang. That's right, the whole kit 'n caboodle, no ifs, ands, or buts about it ... no malarkey. Okee dokey, but she was a skosh busy right then, yada, yada, yada. Yessirreebob, we usually have gadgets galore, but what with the this-and-that, and all the hooplah, it's all I topsy turvy today, 'cuz that humungous nincompoop is still in the whatsit acting like everything's just hunky dory. That's just a bunch gobbledeegook. Pure gibberish. He's such an old rascalion. Jeeminy Christmas, the shenanigans of that old fogey. Yackety schmackety, blah, blah, blah! Shucks, I wanted to find it on my own, and not be penalized for it- I'm just so darned tired of gimme's and gotcha's by a lotta has-been nosybones out hobnobbing with hoity toity wannabes. The real nitty gritty is that, young and old, they're just a buncha happy-go-lucky whippersnappers and cantankerous old fuddyduddies who don't know diddly. I poked among the gewgaws, tchotchkes, gimcracks, and knickknacks, there in the doodad, but I found zilch, zero, zippo, nil, nada and null. So-and-so told me such-and-such about the deeleebob, but I just don't know where that little gizmo is. Sheesh! It's a big whoopeddoo when you can't even remember where the gosh diddly darned whaddyacallit is!

TEXT H:

James was a student at Oxford University, where he was studying law. Like many students he did not have much money because his grant was only just enough to live on. Last year, during the Autumn term he decided to go to Manchester to visit some friends for the weekend, but he could not afford a train ticket (and even the coach was too expensive, so he had to hitchhike. He caught a bus to the beginning of the motorway and waited. It was a cold, windy November day and while he was waiting he got soaked to the skin. After waiting two hours he finally got a lift from a lorry driver, who was in fact going all the way to Manchester. James felt extremely relieved. The lorry driver seemed a friendly fellow of around 35, reasonably well-dressed, and he and James talked a lot. Suddenly, as they were driving along the motorway, a police car raced past them and made them stop. They were taken to the police station because the police suspected that the lorry was carrying stolen goods. A detective interrogated James for two hours, and he even had to spend the night in a cell. He was eventually released the next day. Apparently, the lorry was carrying stolen television sets. James swore that he would never hitchhike again.