

STEP 2, PECULIARITIES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Exercise 26

Read the text that follows and make up 10 logical questions to cover its contents*

The Code of Spoken English

For generations English-speaking people have been pulling to pieces the words of their language and refitting them into other words explanatory of the current events. A generation passed away, but the new words remained. A new generation practiced their use in the circumstances for which they were designed, without appreciating the reason for their coining. In time the words became part of the colloquial or spoken language, the kind of informal English, which is normal in ordinary conversation but not considered acceptable in more formal language. Numerous phrases and words in common usage have grown into the language as *slang*, unexplainable *idioms* and *euphemisms*.

Slang is often coined by groups of people (teenagers, students, professionals, etc) who share an interest occupation or hobby and are discontented with the traditional words and expressions. For this reason it often has a particular colourful and vivid quality which the ordinary expressions lack. Highly informal, *slang* develops when people meet with a new set of circumstances for which they do not feel the current vocabulary is adequate. Thus during the period of disturbance often there is often a great increase in the number of slang coinages. Very often these are words which refer to subjects considered by most people not quite respectable: crime, drink, sex, insanity, for example.

Slang words may come into fashion and disappear. This does not always happen. Many words that were originally coined as slang have remained to become part and parcel of the language. Thus words like *bus*, *snob*, *fun*, *mob* began life as *slang* but because they expressed a meaning which no other word quite expressed they remained in the language to fill a gap.

Like other forms of language, *slang* has its appropriate and inappropriate occasions. For foreign speakers of English and for those

dubious about the context of unfamiliar terms, times and situations where certain words are appropriate for use can be baffling. Most *slang* terms are for use in informal conversations. As meanings are subtle and implications depend on circumstances, it is best to avoid using any *slang* term or phrase unless you are sure of its use.

Writers and speakers could do without *slang* but its colourful and imaginative vocabulary adds vividness to descriptions. *Slang* dictionaries give the reader a tool to understand *slang* and its significance in the smaller communities of speaking culture.

On the other hand there are widely used and longstanding set expressions called *idioms* that constitute the backbone of the spoken language. They are indispensable to the daily speech and to the language of newspapers and books, television and movies. Whenever you hear a phrase whose meaning cannot be understood even if you know the definitions of the separate words involved, you have probably encountered an *idiom*. Most *idioms* have precise constructions, and their whole meaning may be lost if you change them. Mastering *idioms* requires a great deal of listening, studying, practice and usage.

The more recent phenomena are *euphemism* and *politically correct* (*p.c.*) words. Both are used to replace less direct words or names for something which is considered to be inappropriate, unpleasant or offensive in order not to hurt people's feelings or to conceal something, for example, in political or military spheres.

(from 21st century Dictionary of Slang)

Exercise 27

Discuss the text in pairs making use of your questions to the text

Exercise 28

Find in the text equivalents to the following.

to break or take apart

to die

to be created or intended for

to understand the reason for creating words

to have common interest