**AP Language and Comp**

From 2001 released exam

Excerpt from The Decline of Grammar, Geoffrey Nunberg, 1983

Is the English language—or, to put it less apocalyp-

tically, English prose writing—really in a bad way? How

would one tell? The standard jeremiads of the Sunday seems

supplements give only anecdotal evidence, and that of a

(5)curious sort; the examples of degradation that they present

are drawn not from current plays or novels, which are gram-

matically and syntactically extra judicium, but from adver-

tisements, scholarly papers, and—most popular of all—

memos from college deans. It is hard to believe that any of

(10)these texts will survive even until the next century, much

less that late-twentieth-century English will be judged by

their example. Our picture of the English of previous cen-

turies, after all, has been formed on the basis of a careful

selection of the best that was said and thought back then;

(15)their hacks and bureaucrats are mercifully silent now. But

while it is understandable that speakers of a language with a

literary tradition would tend to be pessimistic about its course,

there is no more hard evidence for a general linguistic degen-

eration than there is reason to believe that Aaron and Rose

(20)are inferior to Ruth and Gehrig. **1**

Most of my fellow linguists, in fact, would say that it is

absurd even to talk about a language changing for the better

or the worse. When you have the historical picture before

you, and can see how Indo-European gradually slipped into

(25)Germanic, Germanic into Anglo-Saxon, and Anglo-Saxon

into the English of Chaucer, then Shakespeare, and then

Henry James, the process of linguistic change seems as in-

eluctable and impersonal as continental drift. From this

Olympian point of view, not even the Norman invasion had

(30)much of an effect on the structure of the language, and all

the tirades of all the grammarians since the Renaissance

sound like the prattlings of landscape gardeners who hope

by frantic efforts to keep Alaska from bumping into Asia.

The long run will surely prove the linguists right: English

(35)will survive whatever “abuses” its current critics complain

of. And by that I mean not just that people will go on using

English and its descendants in their daily commerce but that

they will continue to make art with it as well. Yet it is hard

to take comfort in the scholars’ sanguine detachment. We

(40)all know what Keynes**2** said about the long run, and in the

meantime does it really matter not at all how we choose to

speak and write? It may be that my children will use *gift*

and *impact* as verbs without the slightest compunction

(just as I use contact, wondering that anyone ever both-

(45)ered to object to it). But I can’t overcome the feeling that

it is wrong for me to use them in that way and that people

of my generation who say “We decided to gift them with

a desk set” are in some sense guilty of a moral lapse, whether

because they are ignorant or because they are weak. In the

(50)face of that conviction, it really doesn’t matter to me whether

to gift will eventually prevail, carried on the historical tide.

Our glory, Silone3 said, lies in not having to submit to his-

tory.

Linguistic manners are like any others. People have always

found it worthwhile to reflect on how best to behave, for the

sake of at least individual enlightenment and improvement.

Since the eighteenth century, most of our great moralists have

at one time or another turned their attention to the language,

from Addison, Swift, and Johnson to Arnold, James, Shaw,

Mencken, and Orwell. In their essays and in the great gram-

mars and dictionaries, we find the most direct secular contin-

uation of the homiletic tradition, reflecting the conviction

that the mastery of polite prose is a moral accomplishment,

to which we will be moved by appeals to our highest in-

stincts.

1 Aaron, Rose, Ruth, and Gehrig were professional baseball players. Ruth and Gehrig played before Aaron and Rose.

2 John Maynard Keynes: English economist, 1883-1946, who commented that in the long run, we will all be dead

3 Ignazio Silone: Italian novelist and journalist, 1900-1978

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a)1st para-highlight “clear” sentences, summations

b) What does “in a bad way” mean?

c) From where do the “Sunday supplements” gather their evidence

that English prose is in a bad way?

d) The word *their* in line 15 refers to\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

e) Explain the analogy in lines 18-20.

f) 2nd para- What do the writers cited in lines 26-27 have in common?

g) What is the narrator saying about linguistic change in lines 26-27?

h) Explain the analogy in lines 30-33.

i) 3rd para-What is the antecedent of “them” in line 46?

j) 4th para-How does the author’s view differ from that of most of his “fellow” linguists?

1. Taken as a whole, the passage is best described as a

(A) critique of the characteristics of bureaucratic prose

(B) technical analysis of a point of linguistic theory

(C) discussion of differing attitudes toward linguistic change

(D) description that relies primarily on concrete examples

(E) series of admonitions and predictions

2. The italicization of “their” in line 15 suggests that

(A) writers of past eras labored under much different conditions than writers of “Sunday supplements” (lines 7-9)

(B) the terms “hacks” and “bureaucrats” apply also to the writers of the materials mentioned in lines7-9

(C) the terms “hacks” and “bureaucrats” are being used facetiously

(D) the speaker has contempt for sweeping condemnations of writers of earlier eras

(E) the speaker is repeating valid accusations that have been made by others

3. In lines 19-20, the speaker refers to a possible comparison between baseball

players of different eras to illustrate that

(A) arguments about the English language have become a popular pastime

(B) people readily forget the glories of past eras

(C) pessimistic attitudes about change are usually warranted

(D) judgments about declining standards are difficult to support

(E) respect for traditions has declined in many areas

4. Which of the following is used to mock an attitude toward linguistic change?

(A) “apocalyptically” (lines 1-2)

(B) “anecdotal evidence” (line 4)

(C) “careful selection” (lines 13-14)

(D) “hacks and bureaucrats” (line 15)

(E) “understandable” (line 16)

5. Part of the speaker’s rhetorical strategy in paragraph 1 is to

(A) discredit invalid views on the topic

(B) berate the reader for believing misinformation

(C) alarm the reader about the nature of the controversy

(D) enumerate the standards according to which appraisals will be made

(E) convince the reader of the importance of the issue

6. All of the following statements are true of the first sentence of paragraph 2 (lines

21-23) EXCEPT

(A) It alludes to the expertise of the speaker.

(B) It states the main thesis of paragraph 2.

(C) It contradicts the conclusion reached at the end of paragraph 1.

(D) It provides one answer to the question raised at the beginning of the passage.

(E) It enunciates one approach to the issue with which the passage is concerned.

7. In lines 28-29, “this Olympian point of view” refers specifically to the perspective

of one who is

(A) tolerant of the opinions of grammarians

(B) considered a master of the English language

(C) able to influence the development of the language

(D) aware of the “historical picture” (line 23)

(E) familiar with theories of “continental drift” (line 28)

8. The analogy in lines 30-33 accomplishes all of the following EXCEPT

(A) It continues the analogy of “continental drift” (line 28).

(B) It introduces an image that reappears in the last paragraph.

(C) It implies that grammarians’ work is nonessential and ineffective.

(D) It recalls the jeremiads referred to in the opening of the passage.

(E) It emphasizes the futility of opposing changes in the language.

9. In line 35, the phrase “current critics” refers most directly to

(A) the writers of the “standard jeremiads of the Sunday supplements” (lines 3-4)

(B) the authors of “current plays or novels” (line 6)

(C) “college deans” (line 9)

(D) “their hacks and bureaucrats” (line 15)

(E) “my fellow linguists” (line 21)

10. The speaker cites Silone’s comment (lines 52-53) in order to

(A) undercut the issue presented in the following paragraph

(B) justify the statement in the preceding sentence

(C) summarize the attitudes against which the speaking is arguing

(D) convince the reader that the approach to the issue is a neutral one

(E) introduce a digression from the major thesis of the passage

11. A central contrast presented in the passage is that between

(A) anticipated and actual instances of language change

(B) random and novel ways of directing future language changes

(C) philosophical and psychological analyses of language use

(D) parochial and international approaches to changes in various languages

(E) immediate and long-term views of language changes