

L303/L503 Handout: Fact or Misconception?
18 June, 2012

Name: _____

For each statement, circle T for “true” (surprising-but-true fact) or F for “false” (common misconception).
(Adapted from *Language Files, File 1.1*)

1. T F People from the East Coast talk nasally.
2. T F Turkish, among other languages, has a special verb tense used for gossip and hearsay.
3. T F Some people can pick up a language in a couple weeks.
4. T F There are communities, such as the Al-Sayyid Bedouin tribe, in which all members of the community can use a signed language.
5. T F Certain sounds that you could make with your mouth, such as popping or smacking, are never used as speech sounds in any language.
6. T F No language is intrinsically easier or harder to learn than any other.
7. T F Most sentences that you hear and utter are novel; they have never been uttered before.
8. T F Every language has a way to mark verbs for the past tense.
9. T F Some aspects of language appear to be innate.
10. T F No language is more or less logical than any other.
11. T F It's easier to learn Chinese if your ancestry is Chinese.
12. T F Rules like “Don't split infinitives” were invented by people in the eighteenth century who believed that English should be more like Latin.
13. T F Some languages structure sentences by putting the object first and the subject last.
14. T F Nouns can be used to refer only to people, places, or things.
15. T F The language you speak affects whether or not you distinguish between certain sounds.
16. T F There are more than 6'000 languages spoken in the world, but 90% of the population speaks only 10% of them
17. T F Native Americans all speak dialects of the same language.
18. T F Women tend to talk more than men.
19. T F The more time parents spend teaching their children English, the better their children will speak.
20. T F People who say “Nobody ain't done nothin'” aren't thinking logically.
21. T F There is nothing inherent about most words that gives them their meaning: any group of speech sounds could have any meaning.
22. T F There are languages that don't have words for 'right' and 'left' but use words for cardinal directions (like 'north' and 'west' instead).
23. T F The same words in the same order don't always mean the same thing.
24. T F Writing is more perfect than speech.
25. T F You can always recognise someone's background by the way s/he talks.
26. T F Swearing degrades a language.
27. T F There are specific structures in your brain designed to process language.
28. T F Grammar is actually a much more complex phenomenon than anything that could ever be taught in school, but nevertheless every human being masters the grammar of some language.
29. T F Correct spelling preserves a language.
30. T F The rules in grammar textbooks are guidelines for correct language use and should be followed whenever possible.
31. T F Many animals have languages much like human languages.
32. T F There are 'primitive' languages that cannot express complex ideas effectively.