Divided by a common language

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 national variety ____	**a** a recognised form of a language associated with a particular nation
2 lexical divergence ____	**b** divergence in vocabulary between related language varieties
3 orthographic divergence ____	**c** divergence in spelling conventions between related language varieties
4 mutual comprehensibility ____	**d** the degree to which speakers of related varieties can understand one another
5 rhoticity ____	**e** the pronunciation of the letter 'r' in all positions in a word, including after vowels
6 non-rhotic accent ____	**f** an accent that does not pronounce 'r' after vowels except before another vowel
7 pluricentric language ____	**g** a language with multiple recognised, codified standard varieties across different regions or nations
8 standard variety ____	**h** the officially codified, most widely accepted variety of a language within a given community
9 dialect prestige hierarchy ____	**i** a ranked system of social value assigned to different dialects within a language community
10 colonial lag ____	**j** the phenomenon whereby a colonial variety retains older linguistic features lost in the original homeland

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For a recognised form of a language tied to a nation: national variety / a single universal form.

2 For divergence in vocabulary between varieties: lexical divergence / identical vocabulary.

3 For divergence in spelling conventions: orthographic divergence / identical spelling.

4 For the degree speakers of varieties can understand each other: mutual comprehensibility / total incomprehension.

5 For pronouncing 'r' in all positions, including after vowels: rhoticity / non-rhotic pronunciation.

6 For an accent that drops 'r' after vowels: non-rhotic / rhotic.

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7 For a language with multiple recognised standard varieties: a pluricentric language / a single monolithic standard.

8 For a colonial variety retaining older features lost in the homeland: colonial lag / rapid convergence.

3 Complete the dialect-comparison collocations with one word.

1 a _____ variety (= associated with a particular nation)

2 _____ divergence (= differing vocabulary)

3 _____ divergence (= differing spelling)

4 maintain _____ (= ability to understand each other's variety)

5 a _____ accent (= pronounces 'r' in all positions)

6 a _____ language (= multiple recognised standard varieties)

7 a dialect _____ hierarchy (= ranked social value of dialects)

8 exhibit _____ lag (= retaining older features from the homeland)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

colonial lag | dialect prestige hierarchy | lexical divergence | mutual comprehensibility | national variety | non-rhotic accent | orthographic divergence | pluricentric language | rhoticity | standard variety

Case A: English functions as a genuinely 1 _____, with codified national standards recognised in multiple countries rather than a single central authority.
Case B: Researchers documented significant 2 _____ between British and American vocabulary, alongside more modest 3 _____ in spelling conventions.
Case C: Despite these differences, speakers generally maintain strong 4 _____, understanding each other with minimal difficulty in most everyday contexts.
Case D: Many American dialects preserve 5 _____, pronouncing 'r' after vowels, while most varieties of English English developed a 6 _____ instead.
Case E: Some linguists attribute certain preserved American features to 7 _____, whereby colonial settlement froze aspects of the language that continued evolving in the homeland.
Case F: Sociolinguists studying attitudes towards different Englishes note a persistent 8 _____, with certain national or regional varieties consistently rated more favourably than others regardless of actual linguistic merit.
Case G: Each country's officially recognised 9 _____ functions as the 10 _____ taught in schools and used in formal writing.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Is English one language or many?

Linguists debating whether to treat English as a single pluricentric language or a family of closely related but distinct national varieties note that the answer depends substantially on which linguistic level is examined. At the level of core grammar, British and American English remain highly similar, generally supporting high mutual comprehensibility between speakers, whereas vocabulary and, to a lesser extent, spelling show more substantial and systematic divergence. This complicates any simple binary answer, since treating the varieties as entirely separate languages would overstate genuine grammatical divergence, while treating them as perfectly identical understates real, measurable and systematic differences that occasionally do cause genuine communicative difficulty, particularly around highly specific, culturally embedded vocabulary that carries little meaning outside its originating national context.

1 What debate do linguists have regarding English varieties? _____

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2 What does the answer depend substantially on, according to the text? _____

3 What is true of core grammar between British and American English? _____

4 What shows more substantial and systematic divergence? _____

5 Why does treating the varieties as entirely separate languages overstate the case? _____

6 What does treating them as perfectly identical understate? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

1 The two varieties differed substantially in their vocabulary. LEXICAL DIVERGENCE _____

2 English has multiple recognised standard varieties across different countries. PLURICENTRIC LANGUAGE _____

3 The two groups understood each other with minimal difficulty. MUTUAL COMPREHENSIBILITY _____

4 The accent pronounced 'r' after every vowel. RHOTICITY _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing whether English should be treated as one pluricentric language or several distinct national varieties, distinguishing observation from linguistic argument.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 national variety 2 lexical divergence 3 orthographic divergence 4 mutual comprehensibility 5 rhoticity 6 non-rhotic 7 a pluricentric language 8 colonial lag

3 Collocations

1 national 2 lexical 3 orthographic 4 comprehensibility 5 rhotic 6 pluricentric 7 prestige 8 colonial

4 Case notes

1 pluricentric language 2 lexical divergence 3 orthographic divergence 4 mutual comprehensibility 5 rhoticity
6 non-rhotic accent 7 colonial lag 8 dialect prestige hierarchy 9 standard variety 10 national variety... note adjust

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Whether to treat English as a single pluricentric language or a family of distinct national varieties.
2 Which linguistic level is examined.
3 It remains highly similar, generally supporting high mutual comprehensibility.
4 Vocabulary and, to a lesser extent, spelling.
5 Because it would overstate genuine grammatical divergence.
6 Real, measurable and systematic differences that occasionally cause genuine communicative difficulty.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 There was lexical divergence. 2 English is a pluricentric language.
3 They had mutual comprehensibility. 4 The accent showed rhoticity.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.