**TEACHER NOTES What is Language variation?**

This is an introductory unit establishing the general principle of **language change**, which lies at the heart of English language study.

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A LANGUAGE CHANGES?**

**What happens when language changes?**

**Activity 1** aims to encourage students to think about key criteria used to judge the level of vitality of a language. It also offers the opportunity for discussion of wider questions:

* the link between language and identity
* native versus second language speakers
* the relationship between language and political/social status
* the relevance of studying languages from the past

**Activity 2** applies the principles from Activity 1 to real languages in order to ascertain their status. Some decisions will be straightforward, but in other cases students will need to use the information provided. There may be some disagreement about the status of languages like Welsh, Manx, Cornish and Irish since these are in various stages of revitalisation. It should provoke interesting discussion about bilingualism, the value of protecting minority languages and the best ways to do so.

Interesting websites providing information:

UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s languages in Danger* (2010) [www.unesco/culture/languages-atlas](http://www.unesco/culture/languages-atlas) (including maps pinpointing the place where each particular language is spoken). It establishes useful descriptive terms for evaluating language vitality: safe, extinct, endangered (vulnerable; definitely endangered; severely endangered; critically endangered).

University of Cambridge *World Oral Literature Project*  www.oralliterature.org

A catalogue of all the world’s 6,909 known living languages. [www.ethnologue.com/web.asp](http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp)

**What changes language?**

The activities in this section give students the opportunity to start thinking about key language concepts and the way in which they affect language-use:

* audience
* purpose
* context (situation - physical place, period; circumstances - age/gender, mood, status, cultural background, education)
* speech/writing

Terminology can be introduced at a basic or higher level in class discussion depending upon whether this is used as an introductory exercise or as preparation for LG4. In many of the key areas, students will be able to use their own language experiences as the basis for responses – in others they will need the support of the examples, which can be revealed when appropriate or printed out for reference. The aim is to make students consider why language is different before they focus on specific textual examples.

Six key concepts (audience, purpose, age, physical place, invasion, period) are introduced on the main screen. The drop-down box then reveals a sequence of images which can be used as the basis for discussion. A key question addresses the nature of language change in each case, with bullet points and examples to summarise and demonstrate language change in action.

The printable document summarises the on-screen material for reference purposes and also contains additional areas of interest (education, status, mood, culture, speech, writing, exploration and gender). There is plenty of space for students to record their own examples and the outcome of general class discussion.

Students should be encouraged to think about their own language use and about what changes the way they speak and write.