

Task 1. Matching

Mother Tongue has become one of the best selling books on language. Millions of copies have been sold worldwide. But what is behind this social phenomenon?

Read a review of the book below and then match each fragment 1-7 to the heading that best summarises their content. There's one extra heading that you will not need to use.

A review of *Mother Tongue* by Bill Bryson

1. *Mother Tongue* is one of Bill Bryson's earlier books and a superbly manageable and amusing treatise on the English language - where it came from, what it's doing and where it's going. It's the sort of complex subject that needs the lightness of Bryson's touch to give an obviously affectionate and enthusiastic overview not only of its origins and uses but also its eccentricities.
2. Given that English is one of the richest languages in the world because it happily brings words from other languages and makes them its own, the history of its evolution is a riot of anecdotes which Bryson has evidently enjoyed unearthing. For example, many of the erudite definitions in the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, arguably the most ambitious and unrivalled linguistic work in existence, were later found to have been supplied by a long-term inmate of Broadmoor, England's premier prison for the criminally insane.
3. *Mother Tongue* is not just about the history of English, though - the book makes a decent attempt to cover the structure and logic of the English language too, and whilst these sections can become quite dry, Bryson knows the value of dropping in a judiciously timed gag at the most mentally challenging points. These chapters serve best to indicate how fantastically complicated English is and its inherent contradictions which are the bane of any foreign English learner's life.
4. Indeed, it's the anecdotes about other languages that offer tantalising glimpses of just how different things are either side of the linguistic divide. Thanks to its ideogram structure, Chinese language typewriters apparently have 5000 characters and even experienced typists can only turn out a few words a minute. Moreover, there is no such thing as a Chinese alphabetical filing system - so if a secretary dies, the whole office filing system which probably only exists in their head goes with them. *Mother Tongue* was written in the early 1990s, so whether the Chinese have found a way of taming their own language since then is unclear.
5. There are also a good smattering of translatory gaffes - Kennedy's "I am a donut" has become legend, but President Carter went one better by announcing during a Polish state visit that "I desire the Poles carnally" - and an entertaining chapter of the versatility of swearing in English.
6. More soberingly, Bryson also muses on the domination of English across the world and the vagaries of whether its spread as the international language of commerce is wiping out local linguistic culture or bringing about a way of that culture to be shared through mutual understanding. It's not a question he pretends to answer, although he does point out that, with literacy rates falling in the States, foreigners learning English are often becoming better versed in its vocabulary and complexities than native speakers.
7. Certainly *Mother Tongue* is one book that might inspire some students to take a greater interest in the English language - even if it's just for more inventive ways of hurling abuse at their peers.

	HEADING	TEXT
a	A global language.	
b	A historical justification for the inconsistencies of the language.	
c	A legitimate motivation for reading the book.	
d	A light-hearted approach to a difficult topic.	
e	A more complex writing system.	
f	Amusing stories behind the English vocabulary.	
g	Explaining the arduous intricacies of English.	
h	Unintentional mistakes.	

KEY

	HEADING	TEXT
a	A global language.	6
b	A historical justification for the inconsistencies of the language.	-
c	A legitimate motivation for reading the book.	7
d	A light-hearted approach to a difficult topic.	1
e	A more complex writing system.	4
f	Amusing stories behind the English vocabulary.	2
g	Explaining the arduous intricacies of English.	3
h	Unintentional mistakes.	5