Historical Linguistic and Etymological Trivia

Linguistics · Practice Test · 12 Questions

1. Which 1755 publication by Samuel Johnson is widely considered the most influential precursor to modern English lexicography?

A) A Dictionary of the English Language
B) The Universal Etymological English Dictionary
C) An Universal Etymological English Dictionary
D) The English Expositor

2. In historical linguistics, the 'Great Vowel Shift' refers to a massive sound change affecting which variety of the English language?

A) Old English
B) Middle English
C) Early Modern English
D) Late Modern English

3. The word 'alphabet' is derived from the first two letters of which ancient script?

A) Phoenician
B) Greek
C) Etruscan
D) Aramaic

4. What is the etymological origin of the English word 'quarantine', derived from the Venetian dialect spoken during the 14th-century Black Death?

A) Quaranta giorni
B) Quarantena
C) Quarantotto
D) Quarto piano

5. The 'Grimm's Law', formulated in 1822, describes a systematic shift in consonants primarily occurring in which language family?

A) Romance
B) Semitic
C) Germanic
D) Slavic

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6. The term 'vernacular' comes from the Latin word 'vernaculus', which originally referred to what specific group of people?

A) Foreign invaders
B) Educated philosophers
C) Domestic slaves born in a master's house
D) The ruling senatorial class

7. Which 14th-century author is often credited with popularizing the East Midland dialect, which eventually became the basis for Standard English?

A) Geoffrey Chaucer
B) William Langland
C) John Gower
D) Thomas Malory

8. The linguistic term 'loanword' describes a word adopted from a foreign language with little or no modification; what is the specific technical term for this process?

A) Calque
B) Assimilation
C) Lexical borrowing
D) Derivation

9. The 'Boustrophedon' writing style, used in early Greek inscriptions, is unique because it proceeds in what pattern?

A) Top to bottom
B) Right to left only
C) Alternating directions with each line
D) Spiral from the center outward

10. In the history of grammar, 'Prescriptivism' is defined as the belief that language should be regulated according to a set of rules; who was a prominent 18th-century prescriptivist known for his 'Short Introduction to English Grammar'?

A) Robert Lowth
B) Noah Webster
C) Noam Chomsky
D) Samuel Johnson

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11. The English word 'robot' was introduced to the language by Karel Capek in his 1920 play 'R.U.R.', but it was coined by his brother Josef from the Czech word 'robota', which means what?

A) Automation
B) Forced labor
C) Mechanical construct
D) Artificial spirit

12. What is the 'Indo-European' language family hypothesis, first proposed by Sir William Jones in 1786, primarily based on?

A) Geographic proximity of tribes
B) Similarities in Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin
C) Commonality in religious mythology
D) Trade routes of the Bronze Age

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