



3A

## WHISTLED LANGUAGES

### Skills Practice: Paraphrasing [1]

When we are searching for information in a text, we have to be prepared for situations where the references and ideas in the questions are expressed using different words in the reading text. This is called 'paraphrasing' and it can happen a few different ways.

The first is a direct synonym. For example, a question might contain the key word 'fun', but the text uses the word 'enjoyable'.

The second is the use of opposites. For example, a question might contain the key word 'easy', but the text uses the words 'not difficult'.

The third is the use of 'hyponyms', which means '*a kind of ...*' or '*an example of ...*'. For example, a question might contain the key word 'bird', but the text uses the word 'penguin'.

Another is the use of a definition. For example, a question might contain the key phrase 'a wooded area', but the text uses the word 'forest'.



suggested time  
**9 minutes**

# TASK

**SCAN** each paragraph of the article on “Whistled Languages” on the following pages and find synonyms or definitions of the words numbered **1 – 8**.

**example** send

**TRANSMIT** (Paragraph 1)

**1) not common** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 2)

**2) regions** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 3)

**3) a difference of opinion** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 3)

**4) giving** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 4)

**5) comprehend** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 5)

**6) thick** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 6)

**7) volume** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 7)

**8) very old** \_\_\_\_\_ (Paragraph 7)

**SCAN** the text again and find examples of the things listed **9 – 11**. These are not in any order and can be anywhere in the text.

**9) Spoken languages** **SPANISH**, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**10) An island** \_\_\_\_\_

**11) The name of an academic** \_\_\_\_\_

# Whistled Languages

1 Whistled languages use whistling to emulate speech and facilitate communication. A whistled language is a system of whistled communication which allows fluent whistlers to transmit and comprehend a potentially unlimited number of messages over long distances. Whistled languages are different in this respect from the restricted codes sometimes used by herders or animal trainers to transmit simple messages or instructions. Generally, whistled languages emulate the tones or vowel formants of a natural spoken language, as well as aspects of its intonation and prosody, so that trained listeners who speak that language can understand the encoded message.

10 Whistled language is rare compared to spoken language, but it is found in cultures around the world. It is especially common in tone languages where the whistled tones transmit the tones of the syllables (tone melodies of the words). This might be because in tone languages the tone melody carries more of the functional burden of communication while non-tonal phonology carries proportionally less. The genesis of a whistled language has never been recorded in either case and has not yet received much productive study.

15 Whistled languages exist or existed in such parts of the world as the villages Kuşköy in Turkey, Aas in France and Meghalaya in India. They are also used by the Mazatec and Chinantec people of Mexico, the Pirahã of Brazil, the Chepang of Nepal. They are especially common and robust today in parts of Papua New Guinea and West Africa, used widely in such populous languages as Yoruba. Even French is whistled in some areas of western Africa.

20 Silbo on the island of La Gomera in the Canary Islands, based on Spanish, is one of the best-studied whistled languages. The number of distinct sounds or phonemes in this language is a matter of disagreement, varying according to the researcher from two to five vowels and four to nine consonants. This variation may reflect differences in speakers' abilities as well as in the methods used to elicit contrasts. The work of researcher Julien Meyer clarifies this debate by providing the first statistical analyses of production for various whistlers as well as psycholinguistic tests of vowel identification.

30 Though whistled languages are not generally secret codes or secret languages, they may be used for secretive communication among outsiders or others who do not know or understand the whistled language though they may understand its spoken origin. Stories are told of farmers in Aas during World War II, or in La Gomera, who were able to hide evidence of such nefarious activities as milk-watering because they were warned in whistle-speech that the police were approaching.

35 Whistle languages have naturally developed in response to the necessity for humans to communicate in conditions of relative isolation, with possible causes being distance, noise levels, and night, as well as specific activities, such as social information, shepherding, hunting, fishing, courtship, or shamanism. Because of this usage, they are mostly related to places with mountains or dense forests, where they may replace spoken dialogue in the villages while hunting or fishing to overcome the pressure of the acoustic environment.

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The main advantage of whistling speech is that it allows the speaker to cover much larger distances (typically 1–2 kilometres but up to 5 km in mountains and less in reverberating forests) than ordinary speech, without the strain (and lesser range) of shouting. More specifically, whistle speech can reach a loudness of 130 dB, and the transmission range can reach up to 10 km (as verified on La Gomera). The long range of whistling is enhanced by the mountainous terrain found in areas where whistled languages are used. Many areas with such languages work hard to preserve their ancient traditions, in the face of rapidly

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advancing telecommunications systems in many areas.