

Welcome to this exploration of the English language, its properties and history! Here we look at animal sounds, magnificent adjectives, and learn how to tell what a verb is.

Onomatopoeia is a word of Greek origin and means the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named, for example the **beeps** made by a machine or the **crash** made by a falling vase. Below, we are looking at animal sounds and how they differ between nations. Try to match the sound with the animal. If you are not sure, produce the sound yourself and see if that helps. Good luck!

cra, cra	French pigs
meo, meo	Spanish dogs
quack, quack	Indonesian pigs
guau, guau	Italian frogs
kukurikú	British ducks
groin, groin	Chinese owls
gū, gū	Hungarian roosters
ngok, ngok	Vietnamese cats
summ	Czech ducks
káč káč	German bees
noham	Greek dogs
gav gav	Arabic owls
buu	Polish cats
miau miau	Japanese pigs

Why do you think we hear things differently? Can you think of any other onomatopoeias in the language(s) you know? Are they similar to the ones above or completely different?

Adjectives are words such as *big* or *brown* that describe things. Some are easy to remember and some are quite fancy. Have a look at the list below and think about which ones you already know. Do not worry if only a few or none seem familiar. To learn what they mean, look at their **etymology** (that is, their origin and where they came from) and try to come up with **synonyms**, which are words or phrases with a similar meaning. The answers are provided at the end.

opulent (Latin 'opes' = wealth)	
pulchritudinous (Latin "pulchra" = beautiful)	
magnanimous (Latin 'magnus' = great, Latin 'animus' = soul)	
serene (Latin 'serenus' = clear, fine, calm)	
luminous (Latin 'lumen' = light)	
cerulean (Latin 'caelum' = sky/heaven)	
ruminative (Latin 'ruminare' = to chew the cud)	

Now have a look at the sentences below and use one of the adjectives above to fill the gaps:

1. The house was decorated with gold details that caught the light at every turn.
2. The artist painted the moon as a sphere floating above the dark landscape.

3. She offered a response, forgiving the mistake without hesitation.
4. Everyone paused to admire the view from the mountain's edge.
5. He felt strangely as he walked through the quiet early-morning streets.
6. After the meeting, he took a slow walk to think through the decision.
7. A single ribbon tied around the box made it look unexpectedly elegant.

Grammar is a set of rules that tells you how to use a language. You may have already started learning these rules, or you may be learning them for the first time. English follows a simple and very helpful pattern called **SVO**: Subject, Verb, Object.

The **subject** is the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about.

The **verb** is the action.

The **object** is the thing or person that receives the action.

Here is an example:

Mary chased a dog.

Mary is the **subject** (S), chased in the **verb** (V), and dog is the **object** (O).

Try labelling the sentences below with the same: **S**, **V**, and **O**.

Grandma has three grandchildren.

What is 'three'?

- a. a verb b. a numeral determiner c. an object

If you chose 'b', you were correct!

Grandma has three pulchritudinous grandchildren.

What is 'pulchritudinous'?

- a. an object b. a numeral determiner c. an adjective

If you chose answer 'c', you were correct. Congratulations!

Some languages have words that do not exist in English. These words describe feelings or experiences, such as a strong desire to travel, that would take several words to explain in English.

Have a look at the examples below. Have you ever felt any of these things? When? Have you ever experienced anything similar? Would you like English to have words like these too?

Komorebi (Japanese): The beautiful interplay of light and shadows created by sunlight filtering through the leaves of trees.

Sisu (Finnish) - extraordinary determination in the face of adversity

Wanderlust (German) - a strong desire to travel

Gökotta (Swedish) - the act of getting up early in the morning to enjoy the stillness, birdsong, and unique sounds of nature during the small hours.

Omoiyari (Japanese) - the selfless act of anticipating and considering the needs and feelings of others with compassion

Do you think there are experiences in the languages you know that still need a name? For example, the feeling you get when you sit in a chair that someone else has just left and the seat is still warm. How would you name that feeling?

Philosophical questions:

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosopher, said: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." What did he mean by that? Do you agree with him?
 2. When the British philosopher Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, another philosopher, discussed how we know what we claim to know; they used the example of whether there was a rhinoceros in the room. Moore insisted that he could say with certainty that there was no rhinoceros in the room, while Russell challenged him to justify that certainty. What do you think? Are you sure there is no rhinoceros in the room you are in?
 3. Is learning and speaking languages a useful skill? Why? Why not?
 4. Is there any use in our times for the so-called dead languages, e. g. Latin and Greek?
 5. Have you heard of the click languages spoken in Africa? What do you think they sound like?
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Quiz:

Have a look at the questions below and choose one answer for each question. Good luck!

1. What do we call languages of African origin that use click-like sounds?
 - a. clicks b. clickers c. clingons
2. What sort of a language is English?
 - a. Slavic b. Germanic c. African
3. What language would William Shakespeare, the famous playwright speak?
 - a. Middle English b. Low English c. Early Modern English
4. What do the words 'thou, thee, thy' mean?
 - a. 'you, I, he' b. 'hi, hi, hi' c. 'you, you, your'
5. Which of these is archaic, i.e. very old terms/words that we do not really use nowadays?
 - a. cease b. methinks c. quadruple
6. What do we call special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand?
 - a. ragot b. jargon c. vocabulary
7. What is a tonal language?
 - a. a language in which words' meaning change depending on the pitch you use to pronounce the words?
 - b. a language used by the Tona people of Sumatra
 - c. a language that does not use verbs at all
8. What do we call the Anglo-Saxon alphabet that consisted of symbols called runes?
 - a. futhorc b. hieroglyphication c. cuneiform
9. What is the phrase for nouns that exist in plural form only and have no singular one such as 'scissors' or 'pyjamas'?
 - a. pluralia tantum b. pluralia eterneum c. pluralia singularia

10. Why was the XVIII century in England called 'The Age of Grammarians'?

- a. Because the rules of grammar were written down, often with Latin grammar as inspiration for them.
- b. Because children had to learn lots of grammar at a young age and they were not happy with it.
- c. Because Grammarians came to England and expected to be treated nicely.

Answers are provided below. ↴

Answers:

Onomatopoeias:

French pigs make *groin, groin*.

Spanish dogs make *guau, guau*.

Indonesian pigs make *ngok, ngok*.

Italian frogs make *cra cra*.

British ducks make *quack, quack*.

Chinese owls make *buu* (often *bu, boo boo*).

Hungarian roosters make *kukurikú*.

Vietnamese cats make *meo, meo*.

Czech ducks make *káč káč*.

German bees make *summ*.

Greek dogs make *gav gav*.

Arabic owls make *gū, gū*.

Polish cats make *miau miau*.

Japanese pigs make *buu buu*.

Adjectives:

Opulent is rich, luxurious, or showing great wealth.

Pulchritudinous is beautiful in a striking or impressive way.

Magnanimous is generous, noble, and forgiving in spirit.

Serene is calm, peaceful, and untroubled.

Luminous is giving off light or glowing; bright and clear.

Cerulean is deep, clear sky blue.

Ruminative is thoughtful in a slow, reflective way; turning something over in the mind.

Adjectives in sentences:

1. opulent 2. luminous 3. magnanimous 3. pulchritudinous 4. serene 5. ruminative

6. cerulean

Quiz:

1. a 2. b 3. c 4. c 5. b 6. b 7. a 8. a 9. a 10. a