

The Channel Islands and their languages

English language lesson plan for upper secondary schools, extended level

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For the teacher



Creux harbour in the isle of Sark. (source: www.sark.info)

Read also the **General Information on this lesson plan** (file EnglishGeneralInfo.pdf).

Exercise 1. Reading.

Attention: item 1.0 is given as an example how to solve the exercise. The answer for 1.0 is given on the students' worksheet.

Task:

Read the text about the Channel Islands and fill in the gaps with words given below. Use each word only once.

Not that remote but still largely undiscovered, the Channel Islands are a tiny archipelago in the English Channel, just off the northern coast of France. With the largest island being only 5 by 9 miles, they form a mosaic of picturesque sceneries, a (1.0.) **tapestry** of architectural styles and bustling harbour towns. While a popular holiday (1.1) **destination** among the British, many people outside UK do not even know they exist. And even fewer know it is also the linguistic (1.2.) **landscape** – not only the natural one – that makes the Channel Islands so fascinating.

The countryside of Alderney, Sark or Guernsey is best described with adjectives such as 'gorgeous' 'marvellous' and 'breathtaking': once there, take a moment to enjoy (1.3.) **strolls** along cliff paths through unspoiled nature with spectacular views of the sea. But it is not only nature that the Channel Islands are famous for. Jersey is one of the world's successful tax (1.4.) **havens**, nurtured and protected by for the United Kingdom and its elites who want to



use this offshore area to avoid rules they resent. The maller island of Sark had long been known as the last (1.5.) **outpost** of feudalism in Western Europe: the whipping of wives, *droit du seigneur* and other medieval regulations only disappeared in the 2000s as and it was not until 2008 that the rulers of Sark finally agreed to fully switch to democracy.

Although the Channel Islands are not part of the UK, historically they belong to Great Britain. They were part of the Duchy of Normandy when Normans invaded Britain in 1066. There were several attempts to (1.6.) **conquer** the Channel Islands throughout history but the archipelago remained under British (1.7.) **rule** ever since. Norman culture is still present in the islands: not only are there remnants of Norman architecture all over the Channel Islands, but people have also managed to preserve their (1.8.) **heritage** languages which all have common ancestry with the Norman language. Ranging from Guernésiais and Jèrrais with several hundred speakers to Sarkese and Auregnais with only a handful of people who use them – all are threatened with (1.9) **extinction**.



Stamps in Guernésiais issued by Guernsey Post. source: www.thisisguernsey.com

The dominant language of the archipelago is English and the smaller languages of the Channel Islands are no longer used in day-to-day communication. They still remain in (1.10) **symbolic** language use - in 2008 Guernsey Post issued a series of stamps in Guernésiais and there are Jèrrais road signs on Jersey - and there are numerous activists and enthusiasts who will make every effort to promote the use of Jèrrais or Auregnais as well. However, with no official status and younger generations not knowing them anymore, the struggle for saving endangered languages of the Channel Islands far from being over.

words to be used:	tapestry	heritage	rule	symbolic	havens
	destination	landscape	extinction	outposts	conquer

Exercise 2. Listening.

Task: Listen to a sample of Jèrrais – an endangered language spoken in Jersey. Which language does it resemble? [\[audio file\]](#)

suggested answer: French / other Romance languages.

Exercise 3. Speaking.

Good to know before proceeding to this exercise:

This task allows to assess the level of so called language prejudice. Those are all common opinions and prejudices concerning language or dialects: “some forms are correct, others aren't”, “you shouldn't use local dialect in public institutions”, etc. All of us at least once in a lifetime have found ourselves in a situation in which we were ashamed to use the local dialect learnt at home, or felt embarrassed using a colloquial word in a formal situation. However, if we look at language varieties from another perspective, it turns out that they serve us in different spheres of life – social life is as important as professional and family life. We use different language varieties in different domains. There aren't worse or better variants because we can use each one of them to communicate. As the Yiddish language specialist, Max Weinreich, said: “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy” - language is considered to be the variety that “holds power”, i.e. a language that has an official status and a standardized orthography, the variety that is taught at schools and universities. An official language that is used in media and in offices is only one of the dialects. It is customary to attribute more prestige to it than to other dialects.

Sometimes one can come across the opinion that linguistic diversity is a curse that hampers communication and it would have been better if we spoke, for example, only English. Global English shows variation, however, and some accents and/or dialects of the English spoken in places such as India or New Zealand (to name just two examples) can initially prove difficult for non-locals to comprehend. It is natural for human language to create different varieties. Despite progressing globalisation, people in the whole world are different, as they grow up surrounded by different cultures and traditions. Each language is a creation of culture and an important constituent of identity of its speakers. We can feel that cultural diversity enriches us and it is not possible to separate a language from culture.

Attention: before proceeding with this exercise students should form groups of 3-5 persons.

Task: Discuss the following statements in groups. Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?

- 3.1. A language is something completely different from a dialect.

3.2. Some languages/dialects are better than others.

3.3. It'd be better for the mankind if we all spoke the same language.

After some minutes the teacher turns to the students, asking: Are you ready to present your opinions? Each group should have the Chance to present their arguments concerning at least one topic. If the discussion develops, you should guide it by asking: Do you agree or disagree with this group? Why? What is your opinion on that matter?

Exercise 4. Listening.

Task: You are going to hear Julia Sallabank speaking about the Guernésiais language, otherwise known as Guernsey-French. Guernésiais is one of the endangered languages of the Channel Islands. Listen to the recording and decide whether the statements are true or false. Tick (✓) the appropriate box.

Attention: Item 4.0 is given as an example how to solve the exercise. The answer to 4.0 is given on the students' worksheet.

[\[file EnglishExtended JS Guernsey-French.mp3\]](#) © SOAS Radio

		TRUE	FALSE
4.0.	Julia is primarily interested in how the language works. <i>motivation:</i> "I'm particularly interested in language endangerment from a social viewpoint: not just documenting how the language works but why is the language dying out and what can be done to save it – and if people want to save it."		✓
4.1.	Guernsey is the biggest of the Channel Islands. <i>motivation:</i> "There are several Channel Islands: the biggest is Jersey, the second is Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Jethou and there are smaller ones as well."		✓
4.2.	Most of the speakers of Guernésiais have passive rather than active knowledge of the language. <i>motivation:</i> "A lot of people in Guernsey will speak just a few words and in fact, there are a lot more people to understand it than speak it."	✓	
4.3.	Only about 2% of all the inhabitants of Guernsey speak Guernésiais fluently. <i>motivation:</i> "Only about 1 300 people speak Guernésiais, as what native speakers like to call it, fluently, which is about 2% of the population."	✓	

4.4.	It is a generally accepted fact that Guernésiais is a separate language. <i>motivation: "Some people call it a language and some people call it a dialect of Norman."</i>		✓
4.5.	Up to 40% of the English vocabulary may be of Norman origin. <i>motivation: "Historical linguists reckon that between 25 and 40 per cent of English vocabulary comes from Norman."</i>	✓	
4.6.	There has been much development in Guernsey over the last century. <i>motivation: "A hundred years ago Guernsey was very rural and there's been huge amount of development over the last one hundred years."</i>	✓	
4.7.	Most of the people who live in Guernsey were not born there. <i>motivation: "(...) over a third of people who live there were actually not born in Guernsey, most of them were born in Britain."</i>		✓
4.8.	The inhabitants of Guernsey think their island has become so similar to England due to the loss of its heritage language. <i>motivation: "So people see the place becoming more and more like Britain and they look at all the big new buildings, glass and steel and so on, and they say: »Good grief, it looks just like England! It must be because we'd lost Guernsey-French.«"</i>	✓	
4.9.	Attitudes towards Guernésiais have been rather negative throughout the last 20 – 30 years. <i>motivation: "In the last twenty or thirty years, the attitudes have changed an awful lot, and I think that is largely due to the campaigns of some very committed people in the island who've been campaigning for a long time to try to save the language."</i>		✓
4.10.	The first dictionary of Guernésiais was written in 1930s. <i>motivation: "It started back in the 1930s: the first group was started, which is one of the singing groups. And in 1950s people came together to produce a dictionary."</i>		✓

Exercise 5. Listening.

Task: Listen to the interview once again and find answers to the questions. [\[audio file\]](#)

5.1. What does 'a social viewpoint' on language mean?

Suggested answer: It is focusing on social aspects of language use rather than on the structure of the language: its grammar, vocabulary etc. Looking on a language from a social viewpoint means trying

to find answers to questions such as: in which domains is the language used, is the language considered prestigious or not? Do people want to use it in every-day communication?

5.2. Why is Guernésiais an endangered language?

Suggested answer: *Speakers of the language understand it but generally do not speak it well. Guernésiais is used only by 2% of the population of Guernsey and the dominant language in the island is English. All that means Guernésiais is not present in all domains in which a language can be used. Moreover, those who speak Guernésiais are mostly elderly people - the language is not transmitted to younger generations and it is going to die out very soon.*

5.3. Which linguistic feature makes Guernésiais so different from e.g. English?

Suggested answer: *Guernésiais doesn't have a separate word for the 1st person plural nominative pronoun 'we' and one has to put that in a different way.*

5.4. In what aspects do the Guernsey people see themselves as different from the English?

Suggested answer: *In Guernsey people can see the island has become anglicised. They perceive their heritage language as a means of showing their identity as different from the English and in their view the fact that Guernésiais is being lost is the main reason behind the overwhelming anglicisation of Guernsey.*

5.5. What is so unique about the first Guernésiais dictionary?

Suggested answer: *It was not created by linguists but by the community of speakers.*

Exercise 6. Speaking.

Many regions of the world are traditionally multilingual. Different languages are often used for communication in different spheres of life. In regions where many languages are used, there is most often one dominant language which allows communication between different language communities. This is the case with Mexico where Spanish is a tool for communication between various indigenous inhabitants of the country, many of whom have their own language.

There is a vast array of factors that determine if a language is safe. A language is usually considered to be safe when it has an official status, when literature is created in this language, when the language is passed through generations and it has a relatively high and stable number of users.

A language becomes endangered when its situation in one of the domains, or sometimes in many, changes for worse: it is displaced in domains in which it was previously used, or its users migrate to different places and gradually start using different languages and the

language is no longer passed on to younger generations. The latter situation takes place when the language is considered worse (less valuable) and the ability to speak it is less practical and less needed in everyday life than the knowledge of an official language that prevails in a given region.

On the other hand, having an official language status does not guarantee a safe future for a language, while a small number of users does not necessarily mean that a language will vanish soon. For example, Irish is an official language in the Republic of Ireland and in the North of Ireland, and yet the number of daily speakers continues to decrease. Icelandic, on the other hand, with just over 300,000 speakers, is able to maintain its number of speakers for a variety of reasons, including low levels of immigration, geographical isolation and the close link between Icelandic identity and language. Thus a small language is not always endangered, and an official language is not always safe.

Task: Describe the picture. *[After about 10 seconds the teacher asks, if necessary: Can you start now?]*



A greeting board from Guernsey in five languages: Guernésiais, English, French, Dutch and German. *source: en.wikipedia.org.*

Teacher: Thank you. I will now ask you a few questions.

- 6.1. Is it good or bad to have several languages in daily use on one territory? Why?
- 6.2. What does it mean if a language is endangered?
- 6.3. Have you yourself ever encountered an endangered language or dialect?
- 6.4. How would you feel if your language was endangered?
- 6.5. Is a language that is dying out worth saving? Why/Why not?

Exercise 7. Writing.

This task is well suited for homework.

Task: Write an opinion essay on one of the following topics:

7.1. Everyone should have the opportunity to receive education, browse the Internet and read books in their heritage language.

7.2. Language is something more than grammar and vocabulary.

7.3. We shouldn't care about dying languages.

Circle the topic of your selection. You should use 200-250 words.
