Lesson 5: The History of the English Language

Task 1: Anglo-Saxons

Before handing out the worksheets, show students the map and try to elicit which events are depicted (the Anglo-Saxon invasions). Ask your students if they know more or less in which centuries the Anglo-Saxons started to arrive in England, and what effects this had on the local population.

Tell your students that you are about to show them a short clip about how the English language was born. Hand out the worksheet, and ask the students to read the five questions in section one. Check the students understand all the questions. Tell them you are going to play the clip twice, and they should answer the questions.

Play the first chapter of the video 'The History of the English Language in Ten Minutes' (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rexKqvqPVuA). During the second viewing, stop the video in the relevant places and clarify the answers to the questions with the students. Repeat the video if necessary – the narration is rather quick!

Task 2: The Norman Invasion

Try to elicit from the students who the Normans were. Ask them if they know what happened in 1066, etc. Use the five questions in section two and repeat the process of Task 1 for the second chapter of the video.

Task 3: Shakespeare's English

Elicit from the students the name of the man behind Hamlet and Othello. Brainstorm several other Shakespeare plays with the students, and elicit some facts about his life. Explain that Shakespeare had a huge influence on the English language, and that they are about to see a clip that explains why.

Before watching, look at the phrases that Shakespeare coined (listed in section 3 of the worksheet). Ask the students if they can guess what each phrase means. Correct or inform students of the definitions if necessary. Ask the students to listen out for the phrases in the clip, and also to answer the two question in section three of the worksheet.

Play the clip twice. During the second viewing it may be useful to pause the video at some points to clarify understanding.
Task 4: Reading

Depending on how much time you have, you can use the three texts as you wish. The three texts recapitulate the three video clips, so students should be well grounded in the topic. In my one-on-one class, I had the student read out the first text ‘Old English’ aloud, and we discussed some of the issues it raises. I then had the student compare the three extracts of the Lord’s Prayer in Old, Middle, and Early Modern English – seeing which words she could recognise from each text. She enjoyed this more than I thought she would.

Some of the more difficult phrases in the text are in bold, and you may wish to pre-teach them before having the students start to read.

Text 5: Eddie Izzard Buys a Cow

If you have discussed and read about Old English, it is fun to finish with the Eddie Izzard video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeC1yAoWG34). Explain that it is a clip from an English TV documentary about the origins of the English Language, and that the presenter is going to try to speak to a native Frisian in Old English. After watching the video discuss what happened, and why it was possible to communicate with a Frisian in Old English, etc.