

## Think Like a Linguist

*Linguists* study the sounds, words, phrases, and sentences that make up languages. They also study how history and culture affect languages.

Linguists trace how languages and language families develop, where words come from, and how words get invented. They study languages that are spoken today as well as “dead” languages, such as Latin, which are no longer spoken. Some linguists focus on the way modern languages change and are influenced by cultural trends. Others, who specialize in the physical aspects of language, study how the lips, teeth, and tongue work to produce sounds. Their work can help people who have speaking problems or those who are trying to learn a language. Others study sign language and how gestures are used to communicate thoughts and ideas.

A linguist may specialize in one of many different areas. *Philologists* compare ancient and modern languages to learn about the origin and growth of language groups or families. For example, French, Spanish, and Italian are in the family called Romance languages. These languages evolved from their “parent” language, Latin. *Etymologists* study the history and development of words. *Special purpose linguists* study the languages for communicating in specific areas, such as science medicine, religion, or computers.

Some linguists work for publishing companies or for the federal government. They may work as interpreters or translators. Most

linguists work in colleges or universities, where they teach classes and work on research projects.

Linguists research can cover a variety of subjects and can require travel, too. Linguists who study the language of ancient Egypt study writings found inside the pyramids. Those who study the languages of small, isolated groups of people often have to travel to the places where these people live.

## **Education and Training**

Linguists must be patient, curious, and exact, and have good reading, writing, and research skills. If you are interested in becoming a linguist, begin now to learn one or more foreign languages. You should concentrate on your classes in history, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences.

Employers of linguists usually require at least a bachelor's degree in linguistics, English, or a foreign language. Your course work may include: language and culture, the structure of English, linguistics and reading, bilingualism, and computer applications in linguistics. You need a doctoral degree to teach at a university. University professors usually are involved in research projects in addition to teaching.