**Critical thinking and its importance in academic research:**

**1/ Fact or opinion**

Critical thinking aim: To contrast fact with the writer’s opinion.

Language aim: Expressing opinion with reasons.

**Rationale**

Sometimes we read texts or listen to people claiming to present some kind of factually true content. However, when this is the case, it’s important to approach the text critically for information that pretends to be factual when it is in fact the author or speaker’s opinion. By analysing texts in this way, students can learn to identify opinion through the language used and in turn they will learn the language they need to express opinion in their own writing.

The following six sentences come from a longer listening text in which an expert in a radio programme is talking about language extinction.

1) About eighty percent of the world’s population speaks one percent of its languages.

2) Every two weeks another language disappears from the planet because the last remaining

speaker dies.

3) The good news is that some minority communities are trying to save their language by setting up special schools to teach their children.

4) The official language in India is Hindi but speakers of a minority language called Aka are going to preserve the language through the public performance of wonderful songs and storytelling, hopefully.

5) With an estimated 830 different languages, the islands of Papua New Guinea have the largest concentration of linguistic diversity in the world.

6) Local indigenous languages often have words for local plants with medicinal qualities which don’t exist in other languages so I don’t think we can afford to let them die out.

Read the sentences and decide which sentences are factual (F) and which contain elements of the speaker’s opinion (O).

underline the key words which indicate an opinion.

**2/ Vague or accurate?**

Critical thinking aim: To identify vague or accurate language.

Language aim: Using vague and accurate language.

**Rationale**

This exercise has some similarities to the previous activity looking at fact and the writer’s opinion. It asks the student to assess sentences in terms of whether a statement is too vague or imprecise and to raise awareness that language, especially in academic writing, should be accurate and detailed.

**Procedure**

**Q1** Identify which sentence is vague and which sentence presents more accurate information.

**1**

a This film is extraordinarily long.

b This film is 210 minutes long.

**2**

a Two out of every three people in the survey said they can’t speak a second language.

b The vast majority of people in the survey said they can’t speak a second language.

**3**

a All our customers love our latest model.

b Customers that we have spoken to say that they love our latest model.

**4**

a It’s well-known that elephants communicate with each other through infrasounds which are

inaudible to humans.

b Scientists have measured elephants’ infrasounds (under 16 Hz and inaudible to humans)

which can signal to other elephants up to 20 km away.

**5**

a The Harry Potter books by JK Rowling are loved by millions of readers all over the world.

b The Harry Potter books by JK Rowling have been translated into over 70 different languages.

**Q2** In each case, discuss what type of language makes a sentence vague or accurate.

**3/ Evaluating the reliability of sources**

**Critical thinking aim:** To evaluate the reliability of sources of information.

**Language aim:** To discuss the topic of news and media.

**Rationale:** Before we accept information that is presented as fact in a reading or listening text, it is important to consider whether we trust the source of the information. The following activity is a

short warmer into the topic of how much we can trust certain sources.

Imagine you are gathering information for an essay you want to write. The topic of the essay is about whether families spend more or less time together than they did in the past. In order to research and write the essay, you will need to use and refer to different sources of information.

**Q1:** which of the following sources you think are more useful for the investigating about your topic

- A journalist writing an article in a newspaper

- Members of your own family

- An infographic on Facebook

- A video by someone about the topic on YouTube

- A published book by a qualified specialist on the subject

- An entry on Wikipedia

- A survey about family life in a weekly magazine

- A documentary about family life on TV with interviews with real families

**Q2 :** evaluate each source using the following scoring between1-3

1 = Not a reliable source

2 = It might be credible but I’d have to check the information in another source as well

3 = A very credible source of information