

Text analysis 12

“Bad seeds”

Around the world people are taking a closer look at the genetic make-up of what they’re eating – and growing uneasy with what they see. Over the past decade, genetically modified (GM) food has become an increasingly common phenomenon as scientists have **rewoven** the genes of countless fruits and vegetables, turning everyday crops into *über*-crops able to resist frost, withstand herbicides and even produce their own pesticides.

However, many people question whether it’s a good idea for **fallible** human beings to go **mucking about** with the genes of other species. It’s one thing if a scientific experiment goes wrong in a lab, they say, but something else entirely if it **winds up** on your dinner plate. To date, there’s nothing to suggest that re-engineered plants have never done anyone any harm. Nonetheless, the EU has blocked the importation of some GM crops, and since 1997 has required that foods that contain engineered DNA be labelled as such. Plenty of trade watchers in Washington see the European actions as one more **tweak** from an increasingly powerful EU no longer intimidated by US economic might. Public opinion is indeed turning a more skeptical eye on GM technology. “The farmers in France are right”, observes Denis Kucinich, a House Democrat from Cleveland, Ohio, who **stumbled across** the GM food issue this year, and is turning it into something of a cause.

If the outcry in France indeed **portends** global trouble, it’s by no means clear whether it ought to. Some **souped-up** plants are understandably popular with farmers, for whom even a slight increase in yield can mean a big increase in profits. But what happens when GM seeds don’t work?

The transatlantic food fight will probably be high on the agenda of the World Trade Organisation when it meets in November. Two years ago, chief executive Robert Shapiro gambled big on biotech, **spinning off** the company’s chemical division to focus on the new science. While the move made Monsanto a Wall Street darling for a while, investors aren’t as sweet on it anymore.

In Europe, investors are **backing off** as biotech firms buckle under the pressure of public opinion. The most GM foes can hope to **push through** an agri-friendly Congress is a proposal for voluntary labelling that biotech companies would be free to honour or ignore. In a demand-driven market, however, they would ignore it at their peril. In Europe, the Gerber baby-food company, **gave in to** anti-GM sentiments and announced that its products would no longer contain genetically modified ingredients. “This decision was not a safety issue”, insists spokesman Mark Hill, “but rather a response to preferences expressed by our consumers”. Not for the last time, to be sure, it’s consumers who will have the final word.

EXERCISE 1

Have a look at the words which are in bold in the text, using the context, explain the meaning of each one – give just the meaning in this particular context (5 points), and write a complex sentence with each word but in a different context (5 points). You will get 0 points in any of the definitions or sentences containing words which are not English.

1. REWOVEN
2. FALLIBLE

3. TWEAK
4. PORTENDS
5. SOUPED-UP

EXERCISE 2

Provide a one-verb alternative or paraphrase for the following phrasal verbs from the text.

- a. MUCKING ABOUT
- b. WINDS UP
- c. STUMBLED ACROSS
- d. SPINNING OFF
- e. BACKING OFF
- f. PUSH THROUGH
- g. GAVE IN TO

EXERCISE 3

Find words in the text with a similar meaning to the following ones.

- a. CHERISHED
- b. RESIST
- c. BET
- d. DANGER
- e. POWER
- f. ENEMIES
- g. ICE
- h. OPPOSITION

EXERCISE 4

Complete the following sentences using proper words from the text. You can only use each word once.

1. You must ____ at this intersection to let other traffic pass.
2. Make sure you _____ up before the plane takes off.

EXERCISE 5

Explain the use of *be* in the sentence [...] *has required that foods that contain engineered DNA be labelled as such* (par. 2).

Answer key – Practice Test 15

EXERCISE 1 (10 points)

Have a look at the words which are in bold in the text, using the context, explain the meaning of each one – give just **the meaning in this particular context (5 points)**, and write a complex sentence with each word but in a different context **(5 points)**. You will get 0 points in any of the definitions or sentences containing words which are not English.

1. REWOVEN (inf. *reweave*): “to form something new from several different things, or to combine several different things in a new way”: *they’ve rewoven the fabric of horse racing in this country.*
2. FALLIBLE: “capable of errors; able or likely to make mistakes”: *we place our trust in doctors, but they are fallible like everyone else.*
3. TWEAK: “slight modification or alteration, normally in order to improve something”: *the machine was almost working; it just needed a couple of tweaks.*
4. PORTENDS (inf. *portend*): “be an omen of, be a sign that something, generally bad, is likely to happen in the future”: *the street protests may portend a general uprising.*
5. SOUPED-UP: modified, improved or made more powerful by having changes made to it: *Jack’s got a souped-up Fiesta with lots of lights mounted on the front bumper.*

EXERCISE 2

Provide a one-verb alternative or paraphrase for the following phrasal verbs from the text.

- a. MUCKING ABOUT: interfering with, tampering with, damaging or spoiling something
- b. WINDS UP: to end (up) in your plate
- c. STUMBLED ACROSS: find/discover unexpectedly/by chance.
- d. SPINNING OFF: creating something from something already existing/offshooting from something larger.
- e. BACKING OFF: withdrawing / retreating.
- f. PUSH THROUGH: to succeed in getting something accepted
- g. GAVE IN TO: surrendered

EXERCISE 3

Find words in the text with a similar meaning to the following ones.

- i. CHERISHED: **DARLING**
- j. RESIST: **WITHSTAND**
- k. BET: **GAMBLED**
- l. DANGER: **PERIL**
- m. POWER: **MIGHT**
- n. ENEMIES: **FOES**
- o. ICE: **FROST**
- p. OPPOSITION: **OUTCRY**

EXERCISE 4 (10 points)

Complete the following sentences using proper words from the text. You can only use each word once (2 points each one).

3. You must **yield** at this intersection to let other traffic pass.
4. Make sure you **buckle** up before the plane takes off.

EXERCISE 5

Explain the use of *be* in the sentence [...] *has required that foods that contain engineered DNA be labelled as such* (par. 2).

(Topic 30)

This is a case of subjunctive mood, whose status in modern English is quite marginal. The only verb which has specific subjunctive forms is *be*, which has two: *be* and *were*.

There are three contexts in which the subjunctive still occurs: *that*-clauses (mandative subjunctive), formulaic expressions (formulaic subjunctive) and hypothetical contexts (hypothetical subjunctive). In the example from the text we have an instance of mandative subjunctive, which is its most common use: the subjunctive can be found in *that*-clauses as objects of verbs, adjectives and nouns expressing recommendation, suggestion, demand, resolution or volition. In this case, the verb *require* is clearly related to the semantic area of "demand". Other examples would include instances such as: *I insist that she come immediately; it is important that he be there*.

The use of the subjunctive in these contexts is more characteristic of AmE than of BrE, where it is highly formal. BrE prefers other constructions to the subjunctive, especially putative (hypothetical) *should* (1).

- 1) [...] *has required that foods that contain engineered DNA **should be** labelled as such*.