Read the following text carefully (CRYSTAL, David (1987): The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) and answer the questions that follow.

THE MAGIC OF LANGUAGE

The magical influence of language is a theme which reverberates throughout the literatures and legends of the world. Language, especially in its written form, is thought to contain special powers, which only the initiated are allowed to understand or control. The beliefs are often linked to a myth about the divine origins of language, but they extend beyond this, to influence religious activities of all kinds, and to reflect a widespread primitive superstition about objects and events which have a symbolic meaning and use.

[... ] The language is thought to be able to cure sickness, keep evil away, bring good to oneself and harm to an enemy. Such language usually has to be used with great exactitude, if an effect is to be obtained: meticulous attention is paid to pronunciation, phraseology, and verbal tradition (a factor which appears, most notably, in the history of Sanskrit and Massoretic Hebrew). There often has to be a great deal of repetition, in order to intensify the power of words. The language, however, does not have to be intelligible to have its effect: many magical formulae are meaningless to those who use them, but there is still great belief in their efficacy.

VERBAL TABOOS

The word taboo has been borrowed from Tongan, where it means 'holy' or 'untouchable'. Taboos exist in all known cultures, referring to certain acts, objects, or relationships which society wishes to avoid – and thus to the language used to talk about them. Verbal taboos are generally related to sex, the supernatural, excretion, and death, but quite often they extend to other aspects of domestic and social life. For example, certain animals may be considered taboo: the Zuñi of New Mexico prohibit the use of the word takka ('frogs') during ceremonies; until recently, many southern Americans avoided the word bull in polite speech, replacing it by a euphemism, such as he-cow or male beast; in Lappish and Yakuts, the original name for bear is replaced by such phrases as our lord or good father; and wolves, weasels, rats, lice, snakes, and many other animals have been given name-taboos by various
cultures. Even people can be affected: certain members of the family are considered taboo among Australian aborigines; either a special language has to be used to them, or they are not directed addressed at all.

 [...] The usual way of coping with taboo words and notions is to develop euphemisms and circumlocutions. Hundreds of words and phrases have emerged to express basic biological functions, and talk about death has its own linguistic world, with its morticians, caskets, and innumerable ways of dying. English examples include to pass on, pass over, make one's bow, kick the bucket, snuff the candle, go aloft, and cut the painter. French has fermer son parapluie (‘to close one's umbrella’), the indescribably final n'avoir plus mal aux dents (‘to have no more toothache’), and many more.

**Question 1.** Say what you think the text means; then rewrite its main idea using your own words.

**Question 2.** Complete the following sentences:

Language, especially in its written form, is thought to .............................................................
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The beliefs are often linked to a myth about .................................................................
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The language is thought to be able to cure .................................................................
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The word taboo has been borrowed from Tongan, where it means ..................................
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Taboos exist in all .................................................................
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Verbal taboos are generally related to .................................................................
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The usual way of coping with taboo words and notions is to develop ……………………………..

Question 3. What does Crystal mean by the phrase ‘The beliefs are often linked to a myth about the divine origins of language’?

Question 4. What are your personal experiences with verbal taboos, and how do these experiences affect your beliefs about the magical influence of language?