PART II. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS

KEY TOPIC(S):
- A Concise Outline of Linguistic History.

1. Say what you think the following extract means (downloadable from http://www.ttt.org/linglinks/events.html); then rewrite using your own words:

   ...It would hardly be a waste of time if sometimes even the most advanced students in the cognitive sciences were to pay a visit to their ancestors. It is frequently claimed in American philosophy departments that, in order to be a philosopher, it is not necessary to revisit the history of philosophy. It is like the claim that one can become a painter without having ever seen a single work by Raphael, or a writer without having ever read the classics. Such things are theoretically possible; but the 'primitive' artist, condemned to an ignorance of the past, is always recognizable as such and rightly labeled as naïf [...].

   -Umberco Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, page 316

Any thorough understanding of linguistics requires an understanding of not only modern linguistic theory, but also a history of linguistic theory and of events that have shaped language and our understanding of language and linguistics.

Language has been an object of fascination and a subject of serious enquiry for over 2,000 years. Often, the observations have been subjective and anecdotal, as people reflected on such topics as the nature of meaning, ideals of correctness, and the origins of language. But from the earliest periods, there has also been an objective approach, with scholars investigating aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in a detailed and organized way. At the end of the 18th century, the subject attracted an increasing number of specialists, so much that it rapidly became possible to see the emergence of a new field of scientific research with language analysis as its focus. This approach, first known as *philology*, dealt exclusively with the historical development of language. In the present century, the subject has broadened to include the whole range of subject matter represented in this book, and it is now generally called *linguistics* (or *linguistic science*). Linguistics today is a widely practised academic discipline, with several domains of application.

**Question 1.** Mark the thesis and main points of this passage. What would you say is the overall idea David Crystal wants to explore in it?

**Question 2.** Crystal argues that ‘Language has been an object of fascination and a subject of serious enquiry for over 2,000 years’. In what ways do you think the study of linguistic history can help you develop a better understanding of language study?

**Question 3.** How is Philology related with Linguistics? Explain, using your own words.