

Reviving Endangered Languages: Global Efforts to Preserve Heritage

COMPREHENSION • VOCABULARY • DISCUSSION

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Reading Passage

Read the passage carefully. Each paragraph is labelled with a letter for easy reference.

A

In an increasingly interconnected world, the rapid decline of linguistic diversity may appear paradoxical. While globalisation fosters cross-cultural communication and technological advancement, it simultaneously threatens the survival of many minority languages. Today, more than 40% of the world's 7,000+ languages are considered endangered, with some spoken by only a handful of elderly speakers. The urgency to preserve these linguistic treasures is growing, as their disappearance entails the loss of not only unique communication systems but also irreplaceable cultural knowledge. Languages are more than tools for communication; they are vessels of identity, tradition, and worldview. Each language reflects a community's relationship with its environment, its history, and its social structure. For instance, certain Indigenous languages in North America contain dozens of terms for snow or ocean tides, showcasing deep ecological awareness built over generations. When a language vanishes, so too does the cultural framework embedded in its vocabulary, grammar, and oral traditions. In response to this crisis, a growing number of initiatives—both grassroots and institutional—are emerging around the globe. Community-led language revitalisation projects have proven particularly effective. In New Zealand, for example, the Māori people have implemented "language nests" (kōhanga reo), where children are immersed in Māori from a young age. These early education programmes, led by fluent elders and supported by governmental policy, have led to a measurable resurgence in the use of the Māori language among younger generations. Similarly, in Wales, the revitalisation of the Welsh language has been embedded into public policy, education, and media. The establishment of Welsh-medium schools and the presence of Welsh in television, radio, and public signage have helped normalise its use in daily life. A once-declining language is now experiencing a modest but steady increase in speakers, due largely to a coordinated effort combining grassroots enthusiasm with institutional support. Digital tools and technology have also become pivotal in language preservation. Mobile apps, online dictionaries, and social media platforms allow endangered languages to gain visibility and accessibility, particularly among youth. For example, in Canada, speakers of the Cree language are developing text prediction software and online courses tailored for mobile users. Meanwhile, YouTube channels and podcasts in endangered languages are drawing in younger audiences, proving that modern formats can accommodate ancient tongues. Despite these successes, the path to linguistic revival is fraught with challenges. Revitalising a language requires more than academic documentation or symbolic gestures. It demands a community of speakers who actively use the language in daily life. Unfortunately, social stigma, lack of institutional support, and the dominance of global languages like English or Mandarin often inhibit these efforts. In some cases, children are discouraged from learning their ancestral language due to perceptions that it may hinder their social or economic mobility. Furthermore, the political status of minority languages can vary widely. In some countries, they are officially recognised and protected by law; in others, they are marginalised or even suppressed. These disparities can make or break revitalisation efforts. Without state recognition, resources for education, broadcasting, and translation are often limited or unavailable, creating an uphill battle for communities trying to pass on their linguistic heritage. Nonetheless, the global attitude toward language endangerment is shifting. UNESCO and other international bodies have classified language preservation as a key component of cultural sustainability. Declarations such as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–

2032) signal a growing awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity to global heritage. Moreover, collaborations between linguists and native speakers are increasingly emphasising community empowerment rather than mere documentation. Ultimately, the revival of endangered languages is not just about saving words; it is about affirming the value of diverse human experiences. Preserving a language is akin to preserving a worldview—one that contributes to the richness and resilience of global culture. While the challenges remain substantial, the growing number of successful case studies demonstrates that with the right combination of cultural will, policy support, and technological innovation, revitalisation is not only possible but achievable.

Vocabulary Glossary

Key words and phrases from the passage. Study them before attempting the exercise below.

WORD / PHRASE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
paradoxical	when something seems to go against common sense but might be true	<i>It seems paradoxical that a big city can feel lonely.</i>
vessels	containers or holders, often used to carry or transport something	<i>The old jars were vessels for storing grains.</i>
ecological	related to the relationships between living things and their environment	<i>Planting more trees can improve the ecological balance.</i>
revitalisation	making something active, healthy, or strong again	<i>The new park led to the revitalisation of the neighborhood.</i>
immersed	deeply involved in something; surrounded by it	<i>She was immersed in her book, not hearing the phone ring.</i>
stigma	a mark of shame or disapproval; negative feelings about something	<i>There is less stigma about seeking help for mental health now.</i>
perceptions	the way people see or think about something	<i>People's perceptions of the movie were very different.</i>
inhibit	to hold back or slow down something	<i>Shyness can inhibit people from speaking in public.</i>

Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blank

Use one word or phrase from the glossary above to complete each sentence. Each item is used only once. Answers are on the final page.

1. The idea that technology can connect and divide us is _____ to many.
2. Ancient pots served as _____ for carrying water long ago.
3. The new regulations aim to protect the _____ balance of the forest.
4. The city launched a project for the _____ of its historic district.
5. The students were _____ in learning the new language.
6. Social _____ can often discourage people from seeking help.

Comprehension Questions

These questions are different from the online practice test. Choose the best answer (A, B, C, or D). Answers and explanations are on the final page.

Question 1

What is one reason languages are considered important beyond communication?

- A. They contain unique cultural knowledge.
- B. They are easier to learn than other languages.
- C. They are used in international business.
- D. They are mostly spoken by young people.

Question 2

What does the passage suggest about the role of elders in language preservation?

- A. Elders often discourage language learning.
- B. Elders play a key role in teaching younger generations.
- C. Elders are less important than technology.
- D. Elders prefer to teach in schools only.

Question 3

How do mobile apps contribute to language preservation?

- A. They replace teachers in classrooms.
- B. They make languages more accessible to young people.
- C. They eliminate the need for books.
- D. They are used mainly for translation.

Question 4

What does the passage imply about global languages like English?

- A. They help preserve minority languages.
- B. They often overshadow minority languages.
- C. They are mostly spoken in rural areas.
- D. They are declining in use worldwide.

Question 5

Why might minority languages struggle without state recognition?

- A. Because they need international approval.
- B. Because resources for education and media are limited.
- C. Because they are not considered real languages.
- D. Because they don't have a written form.

Discussion & Writing Prompts

Each prompt references a specific detail from the passage above. Use for classroom discussion or a short written response (150–200 words).

1. Paragraph C discusses the use of "language nests" in New Zealand for Māori. How effective do you think similar programs would be in other countries, and what cultural factors might affect their success?

2. According to Paragraph D, Welsh revitalisation involves media and education. Could similar strategies work in a country with multiple minority languages, or would it require a different approach?

3. Paragraph F mentions the role of social stigma in language learning. How might communities change the perception of minority languages to encourage their use among the youth?

Answer Key

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Q1 A

Q2 B

Q3 B

Q4 B

Q5 B

VOCABULARY EXERCISE

FIB1 paradoxical

FIB2 vessels

FIB3 ecological

FIB4 revitalisation

FIB5 immersed

FIB6 stigma

Comprehension Question Explanations

Why the correct answer is right — and why each wrong option is incorrect.

1. What is one reason languages are considered important beyond communication?

✓ A — They contain unique cultural knowledge. The passage states languages hold unique cultural knowledge.

✗ B — They are easier to learn than other languages. The passage does not claim they are easier to learn.

✗ C — They are used in international business. The passage focuses on cultural, not business, importance.

✗ D — They are mostly spoken by young people. It mentions many endangered languages are spoken by elderly.

2. What does the passage suggest about the role of elders in language preservation?

✓ B — Elders play a key role in teaching younger generations. The passage mentions elders leading language nests for Māori.

✗ A — Elders often discourage language learning. Elders are not depicted as discouraging learning.

✗ C — Elders are less important than technology. Elders are shown as important alongside technology.

✗ D — Elders prefer to teach in schools only. Elders teach in various contexts, not just schools.

3. How do mobile apps contribute to language preservation?

✓ B — They make languages more accessible to young people. The passage says mobile apps help make languages accessible to youth.

✗ A — They replace teachers in classrooms. The passage does not mention replacing teachers.

✗ C — They eliminate the need for books. Books are not discussed in this context.

✗ D — They are used mainly for translation. Apps are not described as mainly translation tools.

4. What does the passage imply about global languages like English?

✓ B — They often overshadow minority languages. The passage states global languages dominate and inhibit efforts.

✗ A — They help preserve minority languages. They are not said to help preserve minority languages.

✗ C — They are mostly spoken in rural areas. The passage does not link global languages to rural areas.

✗ D — They are declining in use worldwide. It does not claim global languages are declining.

5. Why might minority languages struggle without state recognition?

✓ **B — Because resources for education and media are limited.**

The passage explains limited resources without recognition.

✗ **A — Because they need international approval.**

International approval is not mentioned as necessary.

✗ **C — Because they are not considered real languages.**

The passage does not question their legitimacy.

✗ **D — Because they don't have a written form.**

The passage does not focus on their written form.

MORE C1 LEVEL READING PRACTICE

Sociology Trust Modern Societies — <https://www.esl-tests.com/reading/c1/sociology-trust-modern-societies>

Economics Global Art Market — <https://www.esl-tests.com/reading/c1/economics-global-art-market>

Digital Memory Technology Changing Human Recall — <https://www.esl-tests.com/reading/c1/digital-memory-technology-changing-human-recall>