



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE SILENT CRISIS OF LANGUAGE EXTINCTION

A

Languages are not merely interchangeable codes for conveying information. Each language organises experience through particular categories, metaphors, and grammatical distinctions, and it often stores a community's history in oral narratives, place names, and ritual speech. For linguists, the current pattern of disappearance is therefore not a neutral process of "modernisation" but a loss of intellectual heritage. Thousands of languages are now spoken by small and ageing populations, and many are vanishing without comprehensive description of their sound systems, grammars, or vocabularies. The crisis is frequently called "silent" because it unfolds outside global media attention: there is rarely a single dramatic event, yet the cumulative outcome is the erosion of cultural diversity and the shrinking of the range of human ways of interpreting reality. In this sense, language extinction is comparable to biodiversity loss—an incremental process that becomes obvious only after variety has already diminished.

B

Language shift, the process by which a community gradually abandons its heritage tongue for a more dominant language, is rarely driven by a simple rejection of identity. More often it reflects practical pressures embedded in economic life. Migration to cities, participation in national labour markets, and schooling conducted in a dominant language can reduce the time and social spaces in which a minority language is useful. When employment, public services, and higher education function mainly through the national or global language, parents may prioritise that language to maximise their children's mobility and reduce the risk of social exclusion. Intergenerational transmission then weakens: the heritage language is used less frequently in public, becomes confined to home contexts, and eventually is spoken mainly by older generations. Once children stop acquiring it as a first language, the shift accelerates, not because the language lacks value to speakers, but because incentives favour the language that offers wider opportunities and prestige—an outcome sometimes framed as linguistic imperialism operating through markets rather than through explicit coercion.

C

Political history can deepen these pressures and leave long shadows. In many regions, minority languages were explicitly suppressed through bans, punishment in schools, or restrictions on publishing and broadcasting. Even where such policies have ended, their



social effects can persist as stigma, shame, and the internalisation of the idea that a local language is “backward” or inappropriate for modern life. Such stigma is especially powerful when institutions—schools, courts, and employers—signal that social advancement requires abandoning the heritage tongue. In communities that experienced coercive assimilation, parents may stop teaching their language not because they disown it, but because they wish to protect their children from discrimination. The result is a self-reinforcing pattern: fewer young speakers means fewer public domains of use, which in turn strengthens the perception that the language is impractical, thereby accelerating shift even after formal repression has been removed.

D

Global media and digital technology can intensify language shift, yet they can also enable revival, depending on infrastructure and control. On the one hand, entertainment, news, and online culture are dominated by a small set of major languages, and younger people may spend hours each day consuming content that offers little reinforcement of local speech. This contributes to a sense that the dominant language is the natural medium for humour, aspiration, and social connection. On the other hand, digital tools can support threatened languages by allowing dispersed speakers to maintain contact, develop online dictionaries, share recordings, and create learning resources. Whether technology becomes a threat or an asset often turns on the digital divide: communities with limited internet access, scarce funding, or weak technical capacity may be excluded from these benefits. Moreover, even when tools exist, effective revitalisation requires meaningful content and social spaces where the language can be used, not merely a digital archive that sits outside daily life.

E

When a language disappears, the loss is not limited to grammar or pronunciation. Languages often encode detailed ecological knowledge, including ethnobotany—specialised vocabulary for plants, medicinal practices, seasonal cycles, and local species behaviour. Place names can function as compressed maps, storing navigation information and historical memory, while terms for soil, water, and landscape can reflect long observation of local environments. Researchers have noted correlations between linguistic diversity and biodiversity, suggesting that areas rich in species are often rich in languages as well, though the relationship is complex and shaped by broader patterns of human settlement and environmental change. Nevertheless, documentation alone cannot keep a language alive as a living system. Recording stories and compiling dictionaries preserves valuable evidence, but without speakers—especially without children acquiring the language—documentation becomes a record of what was spoken, not a continuation of speech in everyday life.



F

Efforts to reverse decline therefore focus on rebuilding intergenerational transmission and creating environments in which the language is usable. Approaches vary widely. Some communities establish immersion schools or “language nests,” where elders and trained teachers interact with young children exclusively in the heritage tongue, aiming to rebuild natural acquisition rather than treat the language as an optional subject. Others prioritise adult learners, producing teaching materials, training instructors, and using media—radio, videos, and social networks—to increase exposure. Yet these initiatives often face practical and ethical constraints. Revitalisation requires skilled labour to record high-quality audio, develop grammars, and create curricula, but projects frequently rely on short-term grants and intermittent staffing. Limited internet access can restrict digital resources, and small communities may struggle to find enough trained teachers. Ethical practice is also crucial: researchers and institutions must obtain consent, follow cultural protocols, and ensure that communities control how recordings and teaching materials are stored, shared, and commercialised, rather than allowing linguistic resources to be extracted without long-term benefit to the speakers.

G

There is also debate over what “saving” a language should mean. For some communities, success is full fluency across generations, with children using the language naturally at home and in public. For others, partial revival—strengthening ceremonial use, restoring place names, or maintaining identity-linked speech—may be meaningful even if everyday fluency remains limited. Some linguists argue that a narrow focus on documentation can unintentionally normalise extinction by treating loss as inevitable; community advocates often insist that language survival is tied to broader empowerment, including land rights and control over institutions that shape daily incentives. In this view, language is not merely a cultural hobby but a public good, worth supporting through policy, schooling options, and media access. Evidence from successful revitalisation efforts suggests that recovery is possible when communities lead programmes, secure institutional support, and create modern domains of use so the language can function in workplaces, digital spaces, and public life. The broader lesson is that language extinction is not a natural law: it reflects choices about whose voices are valued and what kinds of diversity societies are willing to maintain.

Questions 1–5

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph.

List of Headings



- i How economic incentives can redirect everyday language use
- ii How coercion can leave a durable legacy of stigma
- iii The breadth of the crisis and the non-material value of languages
- iv When digital systems undermine local speech and when they enable renewal
- v What disappears with a language, and why archives are not enough
- vi Practical and ethical obstacles facing revitalisation programmes
- vii Different definitions of success in language revival
- viii A reported connection between linguistic and biological diversity
- ix The role of children in sustaining language transmission

1 Paragraph A

2 Paragraph B

3 Paragraph C

4 Paragraph D

5 Paragraph E

Questions 6–9

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

6 The passage suggests that minority languages often disappear because communities reject their heritage.

7 The passage indicates that digital technology can both harm and help threatened languages.

8 The passage states that documentation by itself can maintain a language as a living system.

9 The passage states that ceremonial use is the most common goal of language revitalisation programmes.

Questions 10–13

Complete the summary below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Revitalising threatened languages



Approaches to saving languages differ widely. Some communities establish **10** or use settings known as “language nests,” where elders and trained teachers interact with young children exclusively in the heritage tongue. Such projects often depend on short-term **11** and intermittent staffing. Community advocates also connect language survival with broader empowerment, including **12** and control over institutions. In addition, they regard language as a **13** worth supporting through policy, schooling options, and media access.

Answer Key

1. iii
2. i
3. ii
4. iv
5. v
6. FALSE
7. TRUE
8. FALSE
9. NOT GIVEN
10. immersion schools
11. grants
12. land rights
13. public good