

UN says 2,500 languages face extinction

The United Nations cultural agency UNESCO says the world is in danger of losing 2,500 of the 6,900 languages spoken in the world today. In its latest edition of the 'Atlas of the world's languages in Danger' the UN reports a multi-fold increase since the last atlas was compiled in 2001 when 900 languages were listed as threatened with extinction. Today there are 199 languages in the world spoken by fewer than a dozen people. This includes *Wichita*, which is spoken by 10 people in the US state of Oklahoma, *Gros Ventre*, which is spoken by 10 elderly people in Montana, USA and *Karaim*, which has six speakers in Ukraine. The last four speakers of *Lengilu* talk among themselves in Indonesia. Only one native speaker of *Livonian* in Latvia remains alive.

An amazing 200 languages have become extinct over the last three generations including *Manx* in the Isle of Man in 1974, and *Aasax* in Tanzania in 1976. Traditional *Cornish* became extinct in England around 1777. *Manx* and *Sishee* in New Caledonia are now being revived. Countries with the greatest number of endangered languages that are in peril of disappearing are India with 196, the United States with 192 and Indonesia with 147. Even Africa's 2,000 odd languages are expected to shrink by 10%. Amazingly Papua New Guinea has 800 languages, 88 of which are endangered dialects. Governments in Mexico, Peru, the USA and Canada have been successful in their efforts to prevent indigenous languages from dying out. Rapid economic development in countries such as India and Brazil are putting once healthy tongues at risk.

The new digital version of UNESCO's online atlas is freely available to use. It allows users to search according to country, degree of endangerment, names of languages or by number of speakers. (see page 8 for link)

Western European languages severely endangered include *Breton* (250,000) in Brittany, France and *North Frisian* (10,000) in northern Germany. Definitely endangered languages include *Gaelic* (44,000) in Ireland (Note: It became an official and working language of the European Union by the Council on 13th June 2005, and has been in use since 1st January 2007) and *Sorbian* (19,500) in south east Germany. *Luxembourgish* (300,000) (they now have their own dictionary!) in Luxembourg is regarded as unsafe. Eastern European countries with languages severely endangered include *Vilamovian* (70) in southern Poland,

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Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate

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and *Transylvanian Saxon* (50,000) in Romania. The language of *Rusyn* (1,000,000) in western Ukraine and nearby countries is regarded as safe. Mediterranean countries with languages facing extinction include critically endangered *Gottscheerish* (0 = unknown) in Slovenia, and *Tsakonian* (300) in Greece. Severely endangered languages include *Arbasi* (500) in Croatia, and *Gardiol* (340) in southern Italy.

In India critically endangered languages include *Birhor* (2,000) in the east, *Tai Rong* (100) in the far north east and *Koraga* (16,665) in the south. Himalayan languages critically endangered include *Barām* (342) in Nepal. The languages of the Black mountain people (500) in Bhutan are definitely endangered. Other mountain peoples with languages critically endangered include the *Tirahii* (100) in Afghanistan. Severely endangered is the *Yazgulami* language (6,000) in Tajikistan. The *Chiliss* (2,000) in Pakistan are severely endangered. In China the *She* language (1,000) is critically endangered as is *Manchurian Kirghiz* (5) in northern China. *Shira Yughur* (3,000) in middle China is severely endangered. Russia too sees many languages under threat including *Itelmen* (100) in south eastern Russia, *Central Siberian Yupik* (200) and *Karelian* (1,500) in Western Russia. Asian languages under threat include *Saaroa* (1,500) in Taiwan, *Ainu* (15) in Japan, *Danaw* (1,000) in Burma/Myanmar and *Idul* (50) in Laos. All are critically endangered languages. Other Asian languages under threat include *Arta* (150) in the Philippines, *Punan Batu* (30) in Sarawak, Malaysia and *Lom* (10) in Sumatra, Indonesia. Pacific languages under threat include *Hawaiian* (1,000) in Hawaii, *Penrhym* (600) in the Cook Islands, *Mokilese* (1,050) in Mokil Atol in the Caroline islands in F.S.O. Micronesia and *Rapa* (400) on Rapa Island and Tahiti.

South America sees the *Krenak* (10) in Brazil, the *Lokono* (1,750) in Guyana, the *Leco* (20) in Bolivia and the *Huilliche* (2,000) in Chile as critically endangered languages. Central America sees *Waunana* (6,882) in Panama severely endangered. *Boruca* (70) in Costa Rica, *Itzá* (1,094) in Guatemala and *Tol* (300) in Honduras are all critically endangered languages. North American critically endangered languages include *Southern Haida* (55) in Western Canada, *Holikachuk* (5) in Alaska and *Panamint* (20) in California, USA. Severely endangered languages include *Cherokee* (1,000) in North Carolina / Oklahoma, *Ojibwe* (8,000) in Minnesota / Michigan and *Ute* (300) in Utah.

African critically endangered languages under threat include the recently rediscovered *Ghomara* (100) in Morocco, *Sawknah* (6,000) in Libya, *Nemadi* (100) in Mauritania, *Animere* (700) in Ghana, *Geme* (550) in the Central African Republic, *Xiri* (87) in South Africa, and *Omotik* (50) in Kenya. Severely endangered languages include the *Zay* (1,000) in Ethiopia, *Sigu* (1,000) in Gabon and *Ik* (2,000) in Uganda. Definitely endangered languages are the *Siwi* in Egypt, the *Polci* cluster (22,000) in Nigeria and the *Benga* (3,000) language in Equatorial Guinea. Middle East countries with languages under threat include *Bathari* (300) in Yemen, *Koroshi* (200) in Iran, and *Zidgali* (0=unknown) in Oman. All are critically endangered languages. *Western Neo-Aramic* (20,000) in Syria and *Juhur* (0=unknown) in Israel and *Western Armenian* (200,000) in Lebanon are definitely endangered languages.

There are hundreds more languages threatened by extinction. You can look at the map on the link attached to see more for yourself. I hope this article gives you a taste of the world's disappearing languages. Today you are learning English - the business language of the world but if we all only spoke English wouldn't life be boring!

Note: Languages are split into the following categories: Safe – unsafe – definitely endangered – severely endangered – critically endangered – extinct.

EXERCISES

1. **Languages:** What languages do you speak? How long have you been speaking them? Which is the easiest to learn/speak? Which is the hardest to learn/speak? What language would you like to learn next?

2. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- What is the article about?
- What do you think about the article?
- What do you think about the languages facing extinction?
- Would you like to help save some of the world's languages facing extinction?

6. **Let's think!** Think of five languages that are facing extinction. Then add five languages that have caught your eye! Why? Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these.

Five languages facing extinction	Five languages that caught your eye!
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. **Let's talk! Radio UN:** *In pairs/groups.* You are in the Radio UN studio in New York. One of you is the presenter; the other student(s) is/are one the people listed below. The subject today is 'Languages facing extinction'. Try to get a balanced interview. *5 minutes.*

1	Yourself	3	A UN spokesperson
2	A journalist	4	A spokesperson from a 'tribe'

The teacher will choose some pairs to 'go live' in front of the class.

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8. **Categorise some languages:** With your partner fill in the table below. Which might appeal to you to learn/not learn? Talk about them together. Draw a map on the board to show where they are in the world.

	Language	Country
Extinct		
Critically endangered		
Severely endangered		
Definitely endangered		
Unsafe / Safe		

9. **Languages:** Swap partners. With your new partner on the board write as many words to do with '**Languages**' as you can. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

10. **Quick debate:** In pairs. Student A thinks all languages should be preserved. Student B thinks otherwise. Explain why.

11. **Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Where is or was Manx spoken?
- 2) How many languages in the world are there?
- 3) How many languages have become extinct over the last 3 generations?
- 4) Which language became extinct in 1777?
- 5) Where is the She language spoken?

Student B

- 1) How many languages face extinction?
- 2) 199 languages are marked for what reason?
- 3) Where is Lengilu spoken?
- 4) Where is Arta spoken?
- 5) What have governments in the Americas been successful with?

12. **Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a 2-minute presentation on: **Languages facing extinction**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the good and weak points on each presentation. Learn from the results.

13. **Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **Languages facing extinction**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

14. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare with what other people have written.

- a) I love languages _____
- b) Languages _____
- c) The hardest language _____

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DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article? Why? Why not?
- 2) Why don't we all speak French/German/Chinese/Spanish/Russian as a second language?
- 3) How many languages do you speak? Which ones?
- 4) Do you think it is important to learn a language at an early age?
- 5) Would you consider sending your kids abroad to school for a short time to do a course or whatever to pick up a language skill that might help them in later life?
- 6) Do you think languages should be preserved? Why? Why not?
- 7) Would you help preserve a language? If yes, how would you do this?
- 8) Would you like to learn one of the languages facing extinction in the article?
- 9) Should governments around the world do more to preserve languages?
- 10) Which three languages in the article attracted your attention and why?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) What was the first language you learnt at school?
- 3) When did you start to learn English?
- 4) What languages don't you like speaking? Why? Why not?
- 5) Are you a natural learner of languages or do you struggle to learn a new language?
- 6) Do you think it is important to speak a second language? Why? Why not?
- 7) How important is learning English?
- 8) Is English really the business language of the world?
- 9) Why is English so widely spoken worldwide and why is it spoken by so many today?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's debate! UN says 2,500 languages face extinction

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

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The teacher can moderate the session.

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GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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The United Nations cultural agency UNESCO says the world is in danger of losing 2,500 of the 6,900 languages spoken in the world today. In its latest edition of the 'Atlas of the world's (1)_____ in Danger' the UN reports a multi-fold (2)_____ since the last (3)_____ atlas was compiled in 2001 when 900 languages were listed as threatened with (4)_____. Today there are 199 languages in the world spoken by fewer than a (5)_____ people. This includes *Wichita*, which is spoken by 10 people in the US state of Oklahoma, *Gros Ventre*, which is spoken by 10 elderly people in Montana, USA and *Karaim*, which has six speakers in Ukraine. The last four speakers of *Lengilu* talk among themselves in Indonesia. Only one (6)_____ speaker of *Livonian* in Latvia remains (7)_____.

alive

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atlas

native

extinction

languages

An (2)_____ 200 languages have become (2)_____ over the last three generations including *Manx* in the Isle of Man in 1974, and *Aasax* in Tanzania in 1976. Traditional *Cornish* became extinct in England around 1777. *Manx* and *Sishee* in New Caledonia are now being revived. Countries with the greatest number of endangered languages that are in peril of disappearing are India with 196, the United States with 192 and Indonesia with 147. Even Africa's 2,000 odd languages are expected to (3)_____ by 10%. Amazingly Papua New Guinea has 800 languages, 88 of which are endangered (4)_____. Governments in Mexico, Peru, the USA and Canada have been (5)_____ in their efforts to prevent indigenous languages from dying out. (6)_____ economic development in countries such as India and Brazil are putting once healthy (7)_____ at risk.

endangerment

dialects

extinct

shrink

amazing

rapid

tongues

successful

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GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	critically	11	Himalayan
2	severely	12	Micronesia
3	amazingly	13	dialects
4	tongues	14	extinction
5	countries	15	Mediterranean
6	endangerment	16	definitely
7	generations	17	cluster
8	indigenous	18	threatened
9	cultural	19	shrink
10	traditional	20	languages

LINKS

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00206>

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2009-02/20/content_7494429.htm

<http://www.indigenousportal.com/World/2500-languages-threatened-with-extinction-UNESCO.html>

http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Culture/cul014_languages_die.htm

<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=1&aid=377&dir=2010/February/Wednesday24>

ANSWERS

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