

ISE III

Sample Independent listening task – Endangered Languages

Examiner rubric

You're going to hear part of a talk about languages. You will hear the talk twice. The first time, just listen. Then I'll ask you to tell me generally what the speaker is talking about. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Can you tell me in one or two sentences what the speaker was talking about?

Give the candidate some blank notepaper.

Now listen to the task again. This time make some notes as you listen, if you want to. Then I'll ask you to summarise the reasons why languages might become endangered, and the opinions given about saving endangered languages. Are you ready?

The task will play once.

Now tell me about some of the reasons why languages might become endangered, and the opinions given about saving endangered languages. I'll stop you after one minute.

Audio script

Welcome to today's podcast about languages. There are around six and a half thousand languages currently in use, but unfortunately, this diversity is declining. More and more languages are becoming endangered, that's to say they may well disappear very soon. But why do some languages become endangered?

First of all, sometimes a language is under threat because it only exists in spoken form. There's an idea that spoken languages are too simple to be worth writing down, although this is generally not the case. The problem is that if no record remains, it's possible that the language won't be passed on to a new generation.

And then of course, sometimes a language has so few speakers there's little expectation it'll survive. Often, the remaining speakers are the older generation because it's become common for the younger language-speakers to move away. But without regular communication, the language becomes threatened.

The final reason for languages to become endangered is emigration. On emigrating to a new country, people tend to focus on learning the new language. In the desire to integrate into a new culture, parents might choose not to use their first language with their children, and if this happens, rapid decline in that language could be the result.

Opinions on whether endangered languages should be saved or not are divided. Let's look at some of the arguments.

There are those people who think we shouldn't interfere if a language is in danger. Surely, the argument runs, language loss, like species loss, is a fact of life: the least-used languages should be allowed to fade away just like some species do. This argument seems entirely logical to them.

Some others say it costs too much to save a language that will become no more than a memory of a lost culture. Once a language is identified as endangered, investment is needed to save it. For example, there have to be interviews with remaining speakers and language courses set up. Admittedly, this can be costly.

And, because communication is such a key part of our lives, there is the opinion that it'd be better if we all spoke the same language. The argument is that a world language would create greater respect and understanding.

I have to say, though, that my view is rather different. Taking everything into consideration, I strongly believe that it's essential to work to save endangered languages.

This is because language generates a vital sense of community among users of a particular language group and this shouldn't be ignored. Well, an interesting discussion, and who's to say what our future world will sound like? I hope you've enjoyed this podcast, whatever language you speak!

Answers

Main point/gist: The speaker is talking about the reasons why languages are endangered, and the different opinions about whether endangered languages should be saved.

Possible responses to task

Reasons why languages might become endangered

- ▶ Some only exist in spoken form – (some say too simple to write down) but if no record remains, they are not passed on (to new generation)
- ▶ Some have too few speakers to survive, often older generation – younger people move away and no regular communication
- ▶ Emigration: focus on new language because of desire to integrate – don't use first language

Opinions about saving endangered languages

- ▶ Should not interfere when a language is endangered – language loss is a fact of life (similar to species loss), languages should fade away
- ▶ It costs too much to save a language that will just be a memory (of a lost culture) – investment needed, eg in interviews/courses
- ▶ Should all speak same language – a world language would create respect and understanding
- ▶ (Speaker believes) endangered languages should be saved – create sense of community