Endangered languages

The thread to minority languages in different parts of the world is an area of discussion amongst liguists.

For questions 1 - 4, choose from the extracts A - D.
The extracts may be chosen more than once.

Which extract

shares Extract B's view of the economic significance of major languages? 1 ☐

expresses a different view from the others regarding the need to preserve minority languages? 2 ☐

takes a different view from the others regarding the future of small languages? 3 ☐

takes a similar view to Extract C on the effect of language disappearance? 4 ☐

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A

In our connected globalised world, the languages which dominate communications and business, Mandarin, Hindi, English, Spanish and Russian amongst [1]others, are placing small languages spoken in remote places under increasing pressure. Fewer and fewer people speak languages such as Liki, Taushiro and Dumi as their children shift away from the language of their ancestors towards languages which promise education, success and the chance of a better life. While to many parents [2]this may appear a reasonable choice, giving their offspring the opportunity to achieve the sort of prosperity they see on television, the children themselves often lose touch with their roots. However, in many places the more reasonable option of bilingualism, where children learn to speak both a local and a national language, is being promoted. [3]This gives hope that many endangered languages will survive, allowing people to combine their links to local tradition with access to wider world culture.

B

While individuals are free to choose if they wish to speak a minority language, national governments should be under no obligation to provide education in an economically unproductive language, especially in times of budget constraints. It is generally accepted that national languages unite and help to create wealth while minority regional languages divide. Furthermore, governments have a duty to ensure that young people can fulfil their full potential, meaning that state education must provide [4]them with the ability to speak and work in their national language and so equip them to participate responsibly in national affairs. People whose language competence does not extend beyond the use of a regional tongue have limited prospects. [5]This means that while many people may feel a sentimental attachment to their local language, their government's position should be one of benign neglect, allowing people to speak the language, but not acting to prevent [6]its eventual disappearance.

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C

Many PhD students studying minority languages lack the resources to develop their language skills, with the result that they have to rely on interpreters and translators to communicate with speakers of the language [7]they are studying. [8]This, I believe, has a detrimental effect on the quality of their research. At the same time, [9]they have to struggle against the frequently expressed opinion that minority languages serve no useful purpose and should be allowed to die a natural death. [10]Such a view fails to take into account the fact that a unique body of knowledge and culture, built up over thousands of years, is contained in a language and that language extinction and species extinction are different facets of the same process. [11]They are part of an impending global catastrophe which is beginning to look unavoidable.

D

A healthy language is [12]one which children learn to speak, so that however many adults use the language, if young people do not acquire [13]it, it will not survive. While the disappearance of a language may be a tragedy for the people who speak it, [14]it may appear to be an event of little importance to [15]others. However, I would argue that language diversity is as necessary as biological diversity and that we are simply not aware of all the things we lose when a language disappears. When an animal or plant becomes extinct, we seldom realise how its existence might have benefited us. [16]The same is true for many small languages. Moreover, the resources to prevent their loss are unlikely to ever be available simply because the economic benefits of keeping them alive cannot be demonstrated.

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