

Language Survivors

Currently, linguists estimate that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 languages in the world. Some experts have sounded the alarm that, by the year 2100, at least 3,000 of those languages could be wiped out forever. With so many languages on the brink of extinction, the efforts of social activists, educators, government officials, and many others have converged to try to solve this difficult problem.

- 5 From their accumulated experiences, it has become clear that easy answers are hard to find, and the unique and complex situation of each language has to be taken into consideration if a language is to experience a revival.



Some Hawaiian children attend Pūnana Leo or "language nest," which is credited for growing the number of Hawaiian language speakers under the age of 18 from less than 50 to over 10,000 today.

The Hawaiian Language

The Hawaiian language belongs to a related but not mutually intelligible group of languages spoken by Pacific islanders. It was the only language spoken in Hawaii until Captain Cook's ships descended on the islands in 1778 and disturbed their peaceful isolation. The Hawaiian language eventually developed a writing system, and it flourished under the Kingdom of Hawaii, which existed from 1795 to 1894. It is shocking to think that the number of native Hawaiian speakers has declined from about 500,000 when Captain Cook arrived to a mere 1,000 today.

There is good news, however. Hawaiians have adopted an idea from the Maori people called a "language nest." This is a preschool where children spend time with native

speakers of the language. There has been a distinct resurgence in second language speakers of Hawaiian: from 8,000 in 1993 to 27,000 in 2003.

The Tjapukai Language

- 25 The Tjapukai language is spoken by the Tjapukai people. They inhabited the Kuranda region of northern Queensland, Australia, for 10,000 years. When western settlers attempted to build a railroad through their land to connect the metropolitan areas of Cairns and Herberton, the Tjapukai people fought back. For this, they were forced to move off their land to give up their way of life, and to do farm work and hard labor. Their culture destroyed, their language soon followed, until only a few Tjapukai speakers remained.

- 30 In 1987, an educator named Michael Quinn, and Roy Banning, one of the last Tjapukai speakers, joined forces to revive the Tjapukai language. With the help of an artist, they created materials for language teaching and tried to get people interested in the dying language. Their efforts paid off: many older Tjapukai began to remember their forgotten language, while younger people started to take pride in their native tongue. Then, in 2004, the Tjapukai were given land in a national park to live on. The resurgence of their language and culture has since been an extraordinary success.



The Tjapukai (or Djabugay) people are trying to revive their language and culture after over a century of decline.

Evaluate Progress

Evaluating your progress means thinking about how much you understood from the passage, and how fluently you were able to read the passage to get the information you needed.

Check how well you understood the passage by answering the following questions.

- 1 Why did the author decide to write about the Hawaiian and Tjapukai languages?
 - a because they are both examples of successful language revival
 - b because they both very old languages
 - c because they are both taught in the same way
 - d because they are both probably going to go extinct

- 2 According to the passage, how many languages could be wiped out this century?
 - a 2,100
 - b 3,000
 - c 6,000
 - d 7,000

- 3 Why are there no easy answers to the problem of language revival?
 - a There are too many opinions.
 - b There aren't enough language teachers.
 - c It's a complex problem and different for each language.
 - d It's too expensive to revive languages.

- 4 Before Captain Cook arrived in Hawaii, which of these statements was true?
 - a There was an independent Kingdom of Hawaii.
 - b The Hawaiian people already spoke a little English.
 - c There were only about 1,000 speakers of the Hawaiian language.
 - d There was no writing system for the Hawaiian language.

- 5 Why is a "language nest" probably effective?
 - a because people will be forced to speak the language
 - b because young children can learn from native speakers
 - c because language nests use excellent textbooks
 - d because both English and Hawaiian are used together

- 6 Why did western settlers initially want the Tjapukai land?
 - a They wanted to do farm work.
 - b They wanted to build schools for the Tjapukai.
 - c They wanted to create a national park.
 - d They wanted to build a railroad.

- 7 What did Michael Quinn and Roy Banning do to help the Tjapukai language?
 - a They created language teaching materials.
 - b They made a writing system for the Tjapukai language.
 - c They gave the Tjapukai land to live on.
 - d They created a Tjapukai language nest.