

Section 4

Right, everyone, let's make a start. Over the past few sessions, we've been considering the reasons why some (1), and today I'm going to introduce another factor that affects languages, and the speakers of those languages, and that's technology and, in particular, (2) In order to illustrate its effect, I'm going to focus on the Icelandic language, which is spoken by around 321,000 people, most of whom live in Iceland – an island in the North Atlantic Ocean.

The problem for this language is not (3) – even though this number is small. Nor is it about losing words to other languages, such as English. In fact, the vocabulary of Icelandic is continually increasing because when speakers need a new word for something, they tend to create one, rather than (4) All this makes Icelandic quite a special language – it's changed very little (5), yet it can handle twenty-first-century concepts related to the use of (6) Take, for example, the word for web browser ... this is *vafri* in Icelandic, which comes from the verb 'to wander'. I can't think of (7) because that's exactly what you do mentally when you browse the internet. Then there's an Icelandic word for podcast – which is too hard to pronounce! And so on.

Icelandic, then, is alive and growing, but – and it's a big but – young Icelanders spend a (8) in the digital world and this world is predominantly English. Think about smartphones. They didn't even exist until (9), but today young people use them all the time to (10), play games, listen to music, and so on. Obviously, this is a good thing in many respects because it promotes their bilingual skills, but the extent of (11) in the virtual world is staggering and it's all happening really fast.

For their parents and grandparents, (12) because they already have their native-speaker skills in Icelandic. But for young speakers – well, the outcome is a little troubling. For example, teachers have found that (13) in Icelandic secondary schools can be conducted entirely in English, while teachers of

much younger children have reported situations where their classes (14) what is in a picture using English, rather than Icelandic. The very real and (15) of all this is that the young generation in Iceland is at risk of losing its mother tongue.

Of course, this is happening to (16)too, but while internet companies might be willing to offer, say, French options in their systems, it's much harder for them to justify (17)for a language that has a population the size of a French town, such as Nice. The other drawback of Icelandic is the grammar, which is (18)than in most languages. At the moment, the tech giants are simply not interested in tackling this.

So, what is the Icelandic government doing about this? Well, large sums of money are being allocated to (19)that it is hoped will lead to the development of Icelandic sourced apps and other (20), but clearly this is going to be an uphill struggle.

On the positive side, they know that Icelandic is still (21)and government. It has survived for well over a thousand years and the experts predict that its future in this nation state is sound and will continue to be so. However, there's no doubt that it's becoming (22)in young people's lives.

This raises important questions. When you consider how much of the past is tied up in a language, will young Icelanders lose their (23)? Another issue that concerns the government of Iceland is this. If children are (24)through different routes, neither of which they are (25), will they be able to (26)?