2 Reading Exam

EOI Topic: Language and communication
See: *English File third edition* Intermediate File 4B

PART 2

Read the article about disappearing languages. Mark sentences 1–10 true (T) or false (F). Sentence 0 is the example.

SENTENCE	*0*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ANSWER	***F***										

TOTAL

0 Birds and mammals are disappearing faster than languages.

1 Only 10% of the world's languages are spoken by more than 100,000 people.

2 There are 357 languages in the world that only one person still speaks.

3 There are more living languages than birds and mammals.

4 Tropical countries with forests and mountains generally have both a large variety of birds and a large number of languages.

5 Just under 2% of the world's languages have disappeared in the last 500 years.

6 There are more native languages in North America than in Australia.

7 The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages benefits both nationals and immigrants living in a defined state.

8 People don't want to learn a language that they can only use with a few other people.

9 Mandarin Chinese, English, and Spanish are probably increasing the drop in minority languages.

10 Minority languages are 'endangered' languages.

PART 2

The world's disappearing languages

The number of 'living' languages in the world is decreasing faster than species of the world's wildlife, according to population biologist, Professor Bill Sutherland of the University of East Anglia. His study shows that languages are in far greater danger of becoming extinct than birds or mammals. Linguists estimate that there are 6,809 'living' languages in the world today, but that 90% of them are spoken by fewer than 100,000 people. Some languages are even rarer. 357 languages have fewer than 50 speakers; 46 languages have only one remaining native speaker.

In a study published in *Nature* magazine, Professor Sutherland shows us that an area's proliferation of birds and mammals and its proliferation of languages are influenced by similar environmental factors: 'Countries which are located in close proximity to the tropics, densely forested, and mountainous, tend to support numerous languages. These factors equally affect the amount of bird species found,' he states. Professor Sutherland goes on to say that when we witness any radical environmental changes, such as the mass cutting-down of the world's forests, we see a corresponding decrease in the number of languages spoken and a decrease in the number of animal species found.

While in the last 500 years 1.3% of birds and 1.9% of mammals have disappeared, a staggering 4.5% of the total number of languages has died out in the same period. The strongest influence has been the invasion or colonization of one country by another. Of the 176 languages spoken in North America, 52 have become extinct since the year 1600, and of the 235 languages spoken by Aboriginal Australians, 31 have disappeared.

The issue of the potential decline in 'minority' languages prompted the European Union to adopt the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992. The initiative was designed to protect and to promote historical, regional, and minority languages in Europe. The charter only applies, however, to languages traditionally used by nationals of the individual EU member states, and therefore does not take into account other languages used by immigrants living in the Union. Languages which are 'official' within a region, but not necessarily classified as languages of the state, will no doubt benefit from the protection offered by the Charter.

In the modern world people have little incentive to learn a language where opportunities for its practical use are limited. The Cambap language of Cameroon in Central Africa has just 30 native speakers, and the Leco language of the Bolivian Andes only 20. On the other hand, between 200 and 250 languages are spoken by more than a million people. Of these, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Spanish are the three most widely used. It is predicted that growth in these languages could further accelerate the decline of 'minority' languages in the future. Professor Sutherland points out that compared to threatened animals, a much higher percentage of languages could be considered 'endangered'. He concludes that 'it is clear that the risks to languages exceed those to birds and mammals.'

