

**Starting up**

- How many people do you know who are descended from immigrants to your country but who no longer speak the original mother tongue of their family?
- When you hear people speaking other languages in public places in your country, how do you react?

**Reading**

Studies show that by the third generation, children of immigrants rarely speak the original language of their family. To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions below.

**Reading comprehension**

Based on the information in the article and say whether the following statements are True, False or there is Not enough information given (N). Support your choice by referring to relevant parts of the article.

- 1 In the three-video work, "Mother Tongue" by the artist Zineb Sedira, it seems that all three people understand French.
- 2 The mother tongue of Zineb Sedira's Algerian-born mother is French.
- 3 Zineb Sedira's daughter is most comfortable speaking French.
- 4 In the US, speaking a foreign language in public can annoy and upset some people.
- 5 Speaking Spanish in the US is widely accepted.
- 6 According to a study carried out in the US in 2002, by the third generation children of immigrants rarely speak the family's original language.
- 7 This is true whatever the original language.
- 8 In the US, Spanish speakers are more successful in passing on the language to the next generation and beyond.
- 9 Very few people in the US are bilingual.
- 10 Being bilingual is a very positive thing, both in terms of cognitive development and job opportunities.

## Immigrants' descendants lose the language — sadly

<sup>1</sup>At the Tate Britain exhibition of 60 years of women artists, there is a three-video work called “Mother Tongue” by the Paris-born, London-based artist Zineb Sedira. In the first video, Sedira talks to her Algerian-born mother — her mother speaking Arabic and Sedira replying in French.

<sup>2</sup>In the second video, Sedira speaks French to her young daughter who replies in the English she has learnt at her UK school. In the final video, grandmother and granddaughter talk to each other. Or at least they try to. The young girl looks a bit confused; the grandmother fond and a little sad. They cannot speak to each other in the languages in which they are most comfortable.

<sup>3</sup>I thought of this installation when I read that, according to a poll published recently by the Pew Research Center, 29 per cent of Americans said they were very or somewhat bothered if they heard someone speaking a language other than English in a public place. The older people were the more upset. More than 40 per cent of those over 50 said hearing other languages bothered them.

<sup>4</sup>In both the US and the UK, people have been attacked for speaking Spanish in public. These attacks are brutal, but they are also completely senseless. If they are settled in the US or UK, the children of these speakers of other languages will be much more comfortable speaking English than any other tongue. And, as in the Tate videos, the next generation will often hardly speak the family's original language.

<sup>5</sup>Many studies show that heritage languages are almost entirely lost to immigrants' grandchildren. My grandparents were Yiddish-speakers on one side, German on the other. I can manage a couple of dozen Yiddish words and have struggled, and failed, with German's grammatical complexities.

<sup>6</sup>A study, published in the journal *Demography* in 2002, looked at the US censuses of 1940, 1970 and 1990 and the answers people gave about the languages they spoke at home. The 1940 and 1970 censuses revealed the pattern for the mostly European immigrants who had arrived in the US from countries such as Germany, Poland, Italy and Greece.

<sup>7</sup>Some of the immigrant generation learnt English, but preferred to speak their native languages, especially at home. Their children largely grew up bilingual, but many chose to speak English, even to their immigrant parents. When this bilingual generation established their own homes, they usually spoke English at home. “Consequently, by the third generation, the usual pattern is English monolingualism, and knowledge of the mother tongue is minimal,” the study said.

<sup>8</sup>However, there was some evidence that language loss through the generations was lower for Spanish-speakers: three-quarters of third-generation Cubans lived in households where no language but English was spoken as did two-thirds of the Mexicans. So Spanish survived into the third generation in a minority of families.

<sup>9</sup>Those who manage to keep both languages going are doing their children a favour. Bilingualism is a boon. It has well-established cognitive benefits and speaking two world languages such as English and Spanish is a really positive advantage in the job market and an asset to employers.



**Vocabulary 1**

Find words and phrases in the article with the following meanings:

- 1 the first language that you learn to speak (para 1)
- 2 unsure about or not understanding some things (para 2)
- 3 liking and caring about someone (para 2)
- 4 a form of modern sculpture where the artist uses sound or movement as well as objects in order to make an often temporary work of art (para 3)
- 5 a survey or study in which people are asked their opinion about something (para 3)
- 6 a bit worried or unhappy about something (para 3)
- 7 very unhappy about something (para 3)
- 8 cruel and violent (para 4)
- 9 something that is an important part of a culture (para 5)
- 10 tried hard to do something (para 5)
- 11 an activity when a government officially records information about its citizens (para 6)
- 12 something that brings you benefits and makes your life easier (para 9)

**Vocabulary 2**

Complete these sentences using words and phrases from Vocabulary 1.

- 1 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a survey carried out of the whole population of a country.
- 2 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a survey of people’s opinions about a specific topic.
- 3 The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Hispanic community in the US is Spanish.
- 4 The writer of the article was very impressed by the video \_\_\_\_\_ of Zineb Sedira at Tate Britain.
- 5 In the video, when the grandmother and the granddaughter try to speak to each other in different languages, the young girl looks \_\_\_\_\_, while her grandmother looks at her in a \_\_\_\_\_ way.
- 6 The work by Zineb Sedira shows how \_\_\_\_\_ languages are almost entirely lost to the grandchildren of immigrants.
- 7 Being bilingual is a \_\_\_\_\_, a really positive benefit in the job market.
- 8 Some people in the US are \_\_\_\_\_ and even \_\_\_\_\_ when people speak a foreign language in a public place.
- 9 In some cases, people have even been attacked in the US for speaking Spanish in public, which is a \_\_\_\_\_ reaction.
- 10 The writer’s grandparents spoke German, but he \_\_\_\_\_ with the grammatical complexities of the language and does not speak the language.

**Grammar – adverbs of degree**

We can make adjectives and also verbs weaker or stronger in meaning by using adverbs of degree, such as a *little* or *very*. These are also known as intensifiers.

- 1 There are eight examples of adverbs of degree being used with adjectives in the article.

Can you find them?

- 2 Put the eight adverbs of degree into one of the three categories below.

**Making weaker**

**In the middle**

**Making stronger**

- 3 There are three examples in the article of adverbs of degree being used with a verb.

Can you find them?

**Discussion**

- 1 Most of the examples in the article about descendants of immigrants losing their original language are taken from the US, where of course English is the national language and also an important world language. From your knowledge and experience, would the same result happen in other countries, especially where English is not the national language?
- 2 Do you think that this development is in fact inevitable?
- 3 In the case where an original family language is preserved into the third generation, what are the factors that enable this to happen?

**ANSWER KEY****Reading comprehension**

- 1 True. Zineb Sedira speaks French both to her mother and her daughter, though they reply in either Arabic or English.
- 2 N. Probably it is Arabic, but we are not told.
- 3 False. Her daughter prefers to speak to her mother in English.
- 4 True. *29 per cent of Americans said they were very or somewhat bothered if they heard someone speaking a language other than English in a public place.*
- 5 N. We are not told this.
- 6 True. *By the third generation, the usual pattern is English monolingualism, and knowledge of the mother tongue is minimal.*
- 7 False. ... *there was some evidence that language loss through the generations was lower for Spanish-speakers ... Spanish survived into the third generation in a minority of families.*
- 8 True. ... *there was some evidence that language loss through the generations was lower for Spanish-speakers ... Spanish survived into the third generation in a minority of families.*
- 9 N. We are not given this information.
- 10 True. *Bilingualism is a boon. It has well-established cognitive benefits and speaking two world languages such as English and Spanish is a really positive advantage in the job market and an asset to employers.*

**Vocabulary 1**

- |                 |            |              |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 mother-tongue | 5 poll     | 9 heritage   |
| 2 confused      | 6 bothered | 10 struggled |
| 3 fond          | 7 upset    | 11 census    |
| 4 installation  | 8 brutal   | 12 boon      |

**Vocabulary 2**

- |                 |                     |                              |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 census        | 5 confused ... fond | 8 bothered ... upset         |
| 2 poll          | 6 heritage          | 9 brutal                     |
| 3 mother tongue | 7 boon              | 10 struggles / has struggled |
| 4 installation  |                     |                              |

**Grammar**

- 1 *a bit* confused (para 2), *a little* sad (para 2), *very* bothered (para 3), *somewhat* bothered (para 3), *completely* senseless (para 4), *much* more comfortable (para 4), almost *entirely* lost (para 5), *really* positive (para 9)

**2 Making weaker**

a bit  
a little

**In the middle**

somewhat

**Making stronger**

very  
completely  
much  
(almost) entirely  
really

- 3 *hardly* speak (para 4), *largely* grew up (para 7), *usually* spoke (para 7)

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