



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
General Certificate of Education
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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Paper 1 Written paper

October/November 2012

1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS (Resource Booklet)

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Resource Booklet contains Documents 1 and 2 which you should use to answer the questions.

You should spend approximately 10 minutes reading the documents before attempting to answer the questions.
This is allowed for within the time set for the examination.

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This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.



The documents below consider Endangered Cultures. Read them **both** in order to answer the questions on the question paper.

Document 1: adapted from a lecture given in 2003 by Wade Davis, an Explorer-in-Residence of the National Geographic Society.

Together the myriad cultures of the world make up a web of spiritual life and cultural life that envelops the planet, and is as important to the well-being of the planet as indeed is the biological web of life or biosphere. And you might think of this cultural web of life as being an ethnosphere; defined as the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations, intuitions brought into being by the human imagination.

Just as the biosphere has been severely eroded, so too is the ethnosphere – and at a far greater rate. And the great indicator of that is language loss. When each of you in this room were born, there were 6,000 languages spoken on the planet. Now, a language is not just a body of vocabulary or a set of grammatical rules. It's a vehicle through which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world.

And of those 6,000 languages, fully half are no longer being whispered into the ears of children. They're no longer being taught to babies, which means, effectively, unless something changes, they're already dead. What could be more lonely than to be enveloped in silence, to be the last to speak your language, to have no way to pass on the wisdom of the ancestors? And yet, that dreadful fate is the plight of somebody somewhere on Earth roughly every two weeks, because every two weeks, some elder dies and carries with him into the grave the last syllables of an ancient tongue.

I know there's some of you who say, "Well, wouldn't it be better? Wouldn't the world be a better place if we all just spoke one language?" And I say, "Great, let's make that language Yoruba. Let's make it Kogi." And you'll suddenly discover what it would be like to be unable to speak your own language.

Now, the problem isn't change and the problem is not technology. The Sioux Indians did not stop being Sioux when they gave up the bow and arrow any more than an American stopped being an American when he gave up the horse and buggy. It's not change or technology that threatens the integrity of the ethnosphere. It is power. The crude face of domination. Wherever you look around the world, you discover that these are not cultures destined to fade away. These are dynamic living peoples being driven out of existence by identifiable forces that are beyond their capacity to adapt to. Whether it's deforestation in the homeland of the Penan – a nomadic people from Southeast Asia, – a people who lived free in the forest until a generation ago, and now have been reduced to servitude, as Japanese freighters wait on the horizon ready to fill their holds with raw logs ripped from the forest.

And in the end, then, it comes down to a choice. Do we want to live in a monochromatic world of monotony or do we want to embrace a polychromatic world of diversity?

Document 2: adapted from a speech by Dr Mark Turin to a conference, 'Archiving and Connecting with Communities', held at the University of Cambridge in December. Turin is director of the World Oral Literature Project, Cambridge University anthropologist and linguist.

While scholars around the globe are attempting to document and preserve the diversity of human linguistic expressions, more than 2,400 of these speech forms are endangered and will likely vanish without trace by the end of this century.

A sobering statistic: the Atlas of World Languages in Danger, released by UNESCO in 2009, claims that more than 2,400 of the over 6,500 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing. More than a third of the world's total living languages can be ranked on a sliding scale from vulnerable to extinct. Many will cease to be used in the next generation of speakers.

Most of these languages are entirely oral (or signed) and have no written form, so are at risk of vanishing without trace. The urgency of the task has captured the imagination of a public with regular media coverage along the lines of 'one language lost every week' or 'last speaker of X dies'.

The death of a language is not just about words, nor will it affect only small, 'traditional' and largely oral cultures. Languages convey unique forms of cultural knowledge. Speech forms encode oral traditions. When elders die and livelihoods are disrupted, it is these creative expressions that become threatened.

A well-intentioned and important national education programme in a major language, such as Mandarin Chinese or French, may have the side effect of undermining local traditions and weakening regional languages. And for many communities around the world, the transmission of oral literature and traditions from generation to generation lies at the heart of cultural practice.

As languages die, established systems of learning and knowledge exchange can break down. Globalisation and rapid socio-economic change exert particularly complex pressures on smaller communities, often eroding expressive diversity and transforming culture through assimilation to more dominant ways of life.

What is to be done about language endangerment and its grave cultural effects, and by whom? The World Oral Literature Project encourages collaborations between local communities and committed anthropologists and linguists, documenting and making accessible the voices of vanishing worlds, before they disappear. It provides grants for the documentation of oral literature and archive collections, and organises lectures and workshops to discuss the best strategies for collecting, protecting and connecting research on these endangered narrative traditions.

It will only succeed if the project is of use to indigenous communities. Communities will require copies so future generations can access and understand the cultural knowledge and language of their ancestors. Protection is doing the best we can to ensure that these unique cultural materials are maintained and refreshed as new technologies become available.

Copyright Acknowledgements:

Document 1 © W Davies; www.ted.com/talks/wade_davis_on_endangered_cultures.html; 2003.

Document 2 © M Turin; www.telegraph.co.uk/.../Endangered_Languages_and_Cultures_commentary.html. Telegraph Media Group Ltd.; December 2010.

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