

## Listening scripts

### Task 1

**P = Presenter H = Helena**

- P:** With me today on *Infospeak* is journalist and writer, Helena Drysdale. Hello, Helena, and welcome to the programme.
- H:** Thank you. Good morning.
- P:** Helena, you spent the last two years travelling around Europe doing research for a forthcoming book. What were you trying to find out?
- H:** Yes, we went in search of Europe's minority languages to determine exactly what state they're all in, particularly given today's climate of mass culture and so on. We travelled right up to northern Scandinavia and the Arctic circle, where the Sami reindeer herders live, and we got down as far as Corsica and Sardinia in the sunny Mediterranean. Then there were the mountains of northern Italy where Ladin is spoken, and we had a rather wet and rainy time in Brittany in the west of France with its Celtic Breton. Thirteen countries and 15 minor languages in all.
- P:** By 'us' and 'we', you're referring to your family, of course.
- H:** Yes, my husband Richard, and our two young children, Tallulah and Xanthe – not forgetting the Mob, of course, our trusty mobile home.
- P:** What was that like? Two years together in a mobile home can't have been easy.
- H:** It got a little cramped at times, particularly when the weather kept us in. The kids couldn't run around, they'd start playing up, tempers would overheat, and everyone fell out. But apart from that, fine.
- P:** Yes, I can see. And how did you go about gathering your information? What were your sources?
- H:** I did some research in the library and on the Internet after we came back, but the only real way to get the kind of information I was looking for was by actually talking to people. We met writers, teachers and artists, who generally gave a more intellectual analysis of the situation, and we were able to balance that with the more down-to-earth, personalized accounts of people in the rural areas. That's where many of these languages are most frequently spoken and also where people, particularly the older generation, seemed less reluctant to open up and give us their honest opinion.
- P:** And I imagine they had some very interesting stories to tell about the past.
- H:** Yes, indeed. For example, we often heard stories of punishments that people received for speaking their own language at school. One old lady in the south of France told us how she used to have to wear a stone or a stick round her neck if she was caught speaking Provençal. She had to keep it on until someone else committed the same offence
- and then they'd have to wear it. And whoever had it at the end of the day was made to pay a fine, or sometimes even beaten.

**P:** Hard to believe, really.

**H:** Mm. She's able to laugh about it now, but at the time it was considered deeply shaming to have to wear *le symbole*, as she called it. Sometimes it could be a wooden shoe or a pottery cow, which represented the country bumpkin, someone to be despised.

**P:** And were these punishments effective? Did they contribute to the decline of some of these languages?

**H:** Yes, they lowered the status of a language. But sometimes they helped to keep a language going – at least in the short term, anyway. They caused resentment and made people more defiant towards the authorities. You know, it can be a bit like pruning a tree – if you cut it back, it grows much stronger. But there were and still are other more powerful forces which represent a much bigger threat to the survival of Europe's minority languages.

**P:** By that you mean globalization, I presume.

**H:** That's right. And tourism. Now although tourism can give a language status by attracting outside interest in it, it can also have a negative effect on local cultures. You know, in one place we visited, the natives moan about the influx of outsiders and how they buy up land at giveaway prices to build holiday cottages, and how it's destroying their culture, and so on. But then the very same people are selling up their farms so they can run hotels or open souvenir shops. Understandable, perhaps, but they're encouraging the very thing they're complaining about.

**P:** Are languages like Sami and Provençal endangered species, then?

**H:** Well, I think it's true to say that if no positive action is taken, they'll simply die out. The problem is that some people are indifferent, and even hostile to their own language. They think it's of no use in the modern world, which they so desperately want to be part of. Fortunately, though, there are enough people around who realize that to lose your mother tongue is like losing a part of yourself. Your language makes you who you are. And if you spoke a different language, you'd be a different person. But people on their own can only do so much. It really is up to the European Union to legislate to ensure the survival of minority languages.

**P:** And how exactly do you legislate to save a language?

**H:** Well, I think there are several things you can do. Firstly, of course, the EU would have to bring in ...

## Task 2

(P = Presenter; S = Simon)

P: Most of us have an interest of one kind or another, whether it's keeping an unusual pet, collecting stamps or gardening. Simon is interested in learning about other people's hobbies – both ordinary people's and those of celebrities. Why is this, Simon?

S: Well, the thing is, if you tell me that the bloke sitting opposite me in the train is a teacher or engineer or whatever, I might be able to guess what sort of things he can do – what he's good at – but really, I haven't the faintest idea what he's really like, you know, what makes him tick, whereas if you tell me he's a stamp collector or a leading light of the local drama society, you've pretty much drawn a map of his personality for me.

P: You think people reveal their souls through their hobbies?

S: Absolutely. One of the things you can see straightaway, for example, is whether people are happier in company or whether they prefer solitude. So if they enjoy, let's say, being in a choir, it's often as much the belonging to a group with shared goals as about the singing.

P: And is the same true for people who like curling up with a good book or knitting jumpers? It's not so much the activity itself but the fact they want to get away ...

S: Escape from the world for a bit, yes – be on their own, usually in the fresh air, actually. Look at Jarvis Cocker from the band Pulp – he likes nothing more than being out bird-watching. Or Brian May – he used to be with the band Queen but he spends hours looking at the night sky through his telescope, being on his own. Other famous people fly kites or model aeroplanes – I suppose it's a release from the tension of being in the public eye all the time.

P: And what about actors? I suppose they need activities to occupy them while they're filming.

S: There's a lot of hanging around, yes. You get to see some very glamorous film stars doing crosswords or Sudoku, or knitting quietly by themselves to pass the time. What seems to be the most popular at the moment though is to

bring along board games and play them together. They all seem to take it very seriously and are all determined to win – maybe it takes their minds off the acting and makes them less nervous.

P: What else do people's hobbies tell you?

S: Well, whether you are intellectual or creative, or practical. For example, the Dalai Lama will spend ages, you know, repairing an old film projector which has no instructions, or with his head under a car bonnet, or taking clocks to bits and putting them back together. He is completely in his element.

P: You wouldn't really expect that of a Nobel peace prize winner, would you?

S: Not really, and rock star Bill Wyman, of the Rolling Stones, is also interesting. He goes around with his metal detector – so far he's found about 300 old coins and even a couple of Roman necklaces. But it's not the actual treasure itself that motivates him – I don't think he even

keeps it – he’s just fascinated by the process of archaeology. I’ve heard that a friend is trying to get him to photograph the things he finds so he can publish a book about his findings one day.

P: Let’s hope he does!

S: But perhaps the most interesting thing is the hobbies of leaders and presidents and so on. The ex-Japanese prime minister, Koizumi, is fanatical about Elvis Presley. No, really – he has released a CD with his favourite Elvis tunes on and used to sing Elvis songs at karaoke, even when he was on official visits, to the discomfort of his advisers, one imagines. The late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il collected movies and was so mad about them he even kidnapped an actress once so that she would make movies for him! These interests completely take over their lives!

P: What does that tell us about our leaders?

S: Probably that they have very addictive personalities. Still, it’s better than doing nothing, I suppose, although we are difficult to live with. I say ‘we’ because I’m as bad – I follow a rather indifferent football club around the country and it drives my wife mad. The thing is, you’d be surprised how many otherwise normal people have a really weird compulsion – buying rare books, bungee jumping – you name it, somebody will do it!