
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

I love my language!

The logo for BBC Learning English, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a teal background.

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Sam

And I'm Sam.

Neil

Last weekend I was driving from London to Anglesey in Wales when I saw a road sign written in two languages. It said, 'Welcome to Wales' in English, and below that, it said 'Croeso I Gymru' in Welsh.

Sam

Yes, Welsh is spoken by many people in north Wales. It's the **indigenous** language – the language spoken by the people who originally lived in a place, rather than by others who moved there from somewhere else.

Neil

Welsh is a good example of an **indigenous** language that has survived. Some children speak Welsh in school and the local government has encouraged its spread. But not all indigenous languages have been so lucky, as we'll be finding out in this programme.

Sam

Of course, languages are more than just words – they carry people's history, culture, and identity. So, when an indigenous language disappears so too does the culture.

Neil

Yes, the dominance of international languages, including English, has endangered other less-spoken languages. So, here's my quiz question, Sam. Did you know that nearly 7,000 different languages are spoken around the world? But how many of these are indigenous? Is it:

- a) 3,000?
- b) 4,000? or
- c) 5,000?

Sam

Hmmm, I'll say b) 4,000 languages.

Neil

Ok, Sam, we'll find out the answer at the end of the programme.

Sam

One indigenous language speaker is Mshkogaabwid Kwe. She's from Canada, or 'Turtle Island' as it's called by her tribe. She grew up speaking English instead of her native language, Anishinaabemowin, which she only learned later, as an adult.

Neil

Listen to Mshkogaabwid speaking with BBC World Service programme, The Conversation, about how she felt learning Anishinaabemowin later in life.

Mshkogaabwid Kwe

When I realised that the sounds that were coming out of my mouth were the same sounds that had come out of my ancestors' mouths thousands of years ago I felt a deep sense of who I was and what it means to be Anishinaabemowin and it made me realise that my dream of learning this language and **passing it on** to my children was now accessible, was now reachable, attainable. And, you know, after a couple of months, I was able to understand one full prayer that was said at a ceremony feast and the **glee** in me and the feeling of joy at being able to understand something in my own language, it was the most profound sense of confidence.

Sam

Learning to speak the language of her ancestors gave Mshkogaabwid **glee** – a feeling of happiness, pleasure, or excitement.

Neil

Although she didn't grow up speaking Anishinaabemowin she now wants to **pass it on** to her children. **To pass something on** means to give it to someone, usually in your family, who lives on after you die.

Sam

Mshkogaabwid's decision to raise her children speaking Anishinaabemowin

turned out to be the right one, as she explained to BBC World Service programme, The Conversation.

Mshkogaabwid Kwe

There are lots of **bumps in the road** but it's going very well. My daughter is turning four and she completely understands the language. Being put back into day care, which she's only been there maybe a month, has really influences her English... so I notice she's speaking a lot of English and so that was a little bit rough for the family being an **immersion** home where we only speak Anishinaabemowin when in the home, for there to be so much English, and only recently, over the last week and a half, have we really noticed her **switch** and her shift back into using the language.

Neil

Bringing up her children to speak her indigenous language wasn't easy and Mshkogaabwid says there were some **bumps in the road** - small problems or delays that slowed down or stopped things from developing.

Sam

To help, her family spoke only Anishinaabemowin at home, using a technique called **immersion** - the process of learning a language or skill by using only that and nothing else.

Neil

This meant that Mshkogaabwid's children spoke both English - at school - and Anishinaabemowin - at home. She noticed how they changed between languages when speaking, something known as **code-switching**.

Sam

Mshkogaabwid believes this not only helps her children's development but also gives them a sense of family history, as well as preserving her traditional culture...

Neil

...a culture she hopes they will pass on to their children in turn.

Sam

So while indigenous cultures are threatened by big global languages, there's still hope that many will survive into the future. Which reminds me of your quiz question, Neil. Was my answer, right?

Neil

Ah yes, I asked Sam how many of the 7,000 languages spoken around the world are indigenous.

Sam

And I thought it was b) 4,000 languages.

Neil

Which was the correct answer! And what's amazing is that although indigenous peoples make up under 6% of the global population, they speak more than 4,000 of the world's languages.

Sam

OK, Neil, let's recap the vocabulary from this programme on **indigenous** languages – languages spoken by the people who originally lived in a place rather than others who came later.

Neil

Glee is a feeling of happiness or excitement.

Sam

If you **pass something on**, you give it to someone, usually in your family, who lives on after you.

Neil

A **bump in the road** is a small problem or delay that slows things down.

Sam

Immersion is the process of learning something, like a language or a skill, by using only that and nothing else.

Neil

And finally, **code-switching** is the ability to change between two or more languages when speaking.

Sam

That's all from us.

Neil

Bye for now!

Sam

Bye bye!

VOCABULARY

indigenous

relating to the people who originally lived in a place, rather than people who moved there from somewhere else

glee

a feeling of happiness, pleasure or excitement

pass (something) on to

to give something to someone, usually in your family, who lives on after you die (phrasal verb)

bumps in the road

small problems or delays that slow down or stop something from developing (informal)

immersion

the process of learning something, such as a language or a skill, by using only that and nothing else

code-switching

changing between two or more languages when you are speaking