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LINGUISTIC REGIONS IN THE WORLD

A language is a system of communication that persons within a community use to convey ideas and emotions. The study of languages is called linguistics. Sometimes, people who speak (or sign) the same language find it very easy to communicate with each other. Chances are, people who communicate easily speak a very similar version of version of a language, known as a dialect.

There are hundreds of languages around the world and many thousands more dialects. Of the 142 different language families, six languages stand out as the major language families of the world. They can be found throughout the world, spreading uniquely to different regions and countries. They are: Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Austronesian, Sino-Tibetan and Trans-New Guinea. Each of these families has at least 5% of the world's languages, and together account for two-thirds of all languages. Niger-Congo and Austronesian are the two largest from this perspective, each with over 1,000 languages due to the incredible language diversity in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, respectively. These six families also make up five-sixths of the world's population. Based on speaker count, Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan are the largest two language families, with over 4.6 billion speakers between them. The two most spoken languages are in these families – English is classified as Indo-European, and Mandarin Chinese is classified as Sino-Tibetan.

1. The **Indo-European languages** are a large language family native to western Eurasia. It comprises most of the languages of Europe together with those of the northern Indian Subcontinent and the Iranian Plateau. A few of these languages, such as English, have expanded through colonialism in the modern period and are now spoken across all continents. The Indo European family is divided into several branches or sub-families, the largest of which are the Indo Iranian, Germanic, Romance, and Balto-Slavic groups. The most populous individual languages within them are Spanish, English, Hindustani (Hindi/Urdu), Portuguese, Bengali, Punjabi, and Russian, each with over 100 million speakers. German, French, Marathi, Italian, and Persian have more than 50 million each. In total, 46% of the world's population (3.2 billion) speaks an Indo-European language as a first language, by far the highest of any language family. There are about 445 living Indo-European languages, according to the estimate by *Ethnologue*, with over two thirds (313) of them belonging to the Indo-Iranian branch.
2. **Afroasiatic (Afro-Asiatic)**, also known as **Afrasian** and in older sources as **Hamito Semitic** or **Semito-Hamitic**, is a large language family of about 300 languages that are spoken predominantly in West Asia, North Africa, the Horn of Africa and parts of the Sahel. Afroasiatic languages have over 495 million native speakers, the fourth largest number of any language family (after Indo European, Sino-Tibetan and Niger-Congo). By far the most widely spoken Afroasiatic language or dialect continuum is Arabic. A de facto group of distinct language varieties within the Semitic branch, the languages that evolved from Proto-Arabic have around 313 million native speakers, concentrated primarily in West Asia and North Africa.

3. The **Niger–Congo languages** are the world's third largest language family in terms of number of speakers and Africa's largest in terms of geographical area, number of speakers and number of distinct languages. It is generally considered to be the world's largest language family in terms of distinct languages, ahead of Austronesian, although this is complicated by the ambiguity about what constitutes a distinct language; the number of named Niger–Congo languages listed by *Ethnologue* is 1,540. It is the third-largest language family in the world by number of native speakers, comprising around 700 million people as of 2015. Within Niger–Congo, the Bantu languages alone account for 350 million people (2015), or half the total Niger–Congo speaking population. The most widely spoken Niger–Congo languages by number of native speakers are Yoruba, Igbo, Fula and Zulu. The most widely spoken by total number of speakers is Swahili, which is used as a lingua franca in parts of eastern and southeastern Africa.
4. The **Austronesian languages** are a language family widely spoken throughout Taiwan, the Malay Peninsula, Maritime Southeast Asia, Madagascar and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. There are also a few speakers in continental Asia. They are spoken by about 386 million people (4.9% of the world population). This makes it the fifth-largest language family by number of speakers. Major Austronesian languages include Malay (Indonesian and Malaysian), Javanese, and Tagalog (Filipino). According to some estimates, the family contains 1,257 languages, which is the second most of any language family.
5. **Sino-Tibetan**, in a few sources also known as **Trans-Himalayan**, is a family of more than 400 languages, second only to Indo-European in number of native speakers. The Sino-Tibetan language with the most native speakers is Mandarin Chinese (920 million), although since not all forms of Mandarin are mutually-intelligible, it may be regarded as a complex series of dialect continua. Other Sino-Tibetan languages with large numbers of speakers include Burmese (33 million) and the Tibetic languages (six million). Other languages of the family are spoken in the Himalayas, the Southeast Asian Massif, and the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau; the latter group, in most cases, have only small speech communities, in remote mountain areas, and as such are poorly documented. While most linguists do not include Kra–Dai and Hmong–Mien languages within Sino-Tibetan, Chinese linguists generally do include them.
6. **Trans–New Guinea** (TNG) is an extensive family of Papuan languages spoken in New Guinea and neighboring islands, perhaps the third-largest language family in the world by number of languages. The core of the family is considered to be established, but its boundaries and overall membership are uncertain. The languages are spoken by around 3 million people. There have been three main proposals as to its internal classification.

Mapped: The six major language families, 2019
Indo-European



Afro-Asiatic



Niger-Congo



Austronesian



Sino-Tibetan



Trans-New Guinea

