

20 things you may not have known about languages



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For many people, the Biblical account of the building of the **Tower of Babel** (in Genesis 11) accounts for the fact that there are **multiple languages spoken in the world**. Beyond that, most have not given it much thought, but what follows makes for some fascinating reading:

1. Currently there are more than **6700 languages** in the world. This includes many **dialects**. A dialect is a regional form of a language which has its own particular pronunciations, vocabulary and meanings.
2. Of these, **Europe** (which has about one quarter of the world's population) **speaks roughly 230 indigenous languages** (sources vary between 224 and 235).
3. **Asia and Africa** are responsible for hosting the **bulk of the world's languages**.
4. **English is presently the top business language**, but it places **3rd** in the table of native speakers (328 million speakers), just behind **Spanish in 2nd place** (with 1 million more speakers) and very far behind **1st place Mandarin Chinese** (boasting 845 million speakers!)
5. **94% of all languages are spoken by a mere 6% of the world's population**. This means that there are a lot of languages spoken by only a few thousand people each.
6. **133 languages have fewer than 10 speakers**; 472 languages have fewer than 100 native speakers, and only 8 languages have more than 100 million people regarding them as their **native language**.
7. **European languages** fall largely into three categories: **Germanic, Slavic or Romance**. Most of them use the Latin alphabet, but some Slavic languages use one that is Cyrillic. Languages that have their own alphabet are Greek, Georgian, Armenian and Yiddish.
8. **While Russia has the most languages spoken** (between 130 and 200, depending on which criteria are used), **London alone boasts more than 300 languages**.
9. The **most difficult language to learn is Basque** (spoken in parts of Spain and France). It's complicated word structure and vocabulary bears no relation to any other language in the world.
10. It is reckoned that at least **one in two people are bilingual or multi-lingual**. Most people have a stronger native language, but some are truly bilingual.



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11. **Bilingualism makes the learning of other languages easier** and promotes inter-cultural contact.
12. **Bilingualism and multilingualism have economic benefits.** There are more jobs available to people who possess the ability to communicate in more than one language. Companies that are multilingual also have a competitive edge.
13. **13 languages** are spoken by more than 100 million people: Mandarin Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Malay-Indonesian, French, Japanese, German, and Urdu.
14. The **Chinese language does not need punctuation.**
15. The **Philippines has two official languages, but over 1000 dialects.**
16. **Many African languages include a “click” sound** pronounced at the same time as other sounds. These sounds are only really mastered by those who learn them in childhood.

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17. **English** is the language in which all **international pilots identify themselves.**
18. **There are many languages that have a vocabulary of 50,000 words or more,** but most speakers use only a fraction of that vocabulary in everyday conversation.
19. **Babies utter their first understandable words at around one year.** By three years complex sentences are formed and at five years children possess thousands of words.
20. According to Illinois state law, it is **illegal to speak English.** The officially recognized language is "American." ☺

As people connect daily through the Internet, one of the problems that face us is finding those who will be able to translate the world's information for everyone in their mother tongue.

The history of English & Spanish

Have you ever wondered where languages actually come from? How they developed? How they have evolved over the centuries? English is the *de facto* national language of the United States. However, no *official language* exists at the federal level. Spanish is the second most common language in the country.

Let's take a look at American English: American English resulted as a variation of British English during the English colonization of North America, starting around 1600, by the “freezing” of some English pronunciations.

American English is a variation of British English, which, in turn, has its origins in the language that replaced the original Celtic languages spoken by the earliest inhabitants of the British Islands.



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This language was known as Englisc, the language of the Angles – natives of England – who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD, along with the Saxons and the Jutes. The Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes were three Germanic tribes from today Denmark and Northern Germany.

The three tribes' similar languages developed into what is now known as Old English (450 – 1100 AD).

In the 11th century the Normans invaded and conquered England, their French language of the time becoming the official language of the Royal Court, while the lower classes still spoke English.

The Norman influence with its tendency for French-derived words produced what is now referred to as Middle English (1100 – 1500 AD).

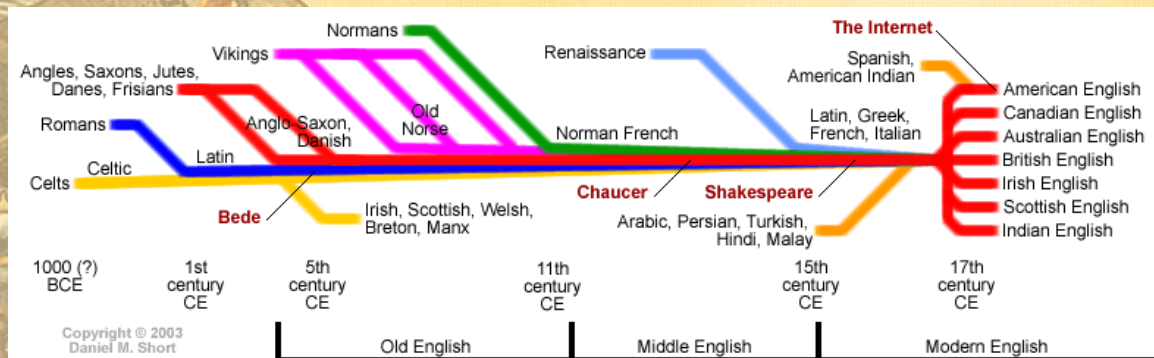
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Early Modern English (1500 – 1800 AD) developed from the Great Vowel Shift and transformed even further when the dialect of London became the standard and Spelling and Grammar became fixed, among other important changes, while still adopting foreign words, especially from Latin and Greek, since the Renaissance.

The main difference between Early Modern English and Late Modern English (1800 – Present) is vocabulary thanks to the need for new words that the Industrial Revolution and technology created, and the adoption of foreign words from many countries when the British Empire covered, at its height, one quarter of the earth's surface.

Interesting fact: Some of the expressions called “Americanisms” by the British are in fact original British expressions lost for some time in Britain but preserved in the colonies (for example *trash* for rubbish, *loan* as a verb instead of lend, and *fall* for autumn).

Other varieties of Modern English worldwide include Australian English, Canadian English, Caribbean English, Indian English, New Zealand English and South African English.



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Let's take a look at Spanish: We have all heard that Spanish is derived from Latin. In fact Spanish is *the same linguistic entity that Latin was*, only two millennia later.

More specifically, Spanish is the most widely used name of the current form of Latin that developed in the north-central part of the Iberian Peninsula historically called Castile (whence the language's other name, Castilian).

The history of the Spanish language and the origin of the dialects of Spain begin with the linguistic evolution of Vulgar Latin – the Latin of the educated Roman classes mixed with the pre-Roman languages of the Iberians, Celts, and Carthaginians. Spanish is the most widely spoken Romance language (the rest of which are: French, Italian, Catalan, Portuguese, and Romanian), not only in terms of the number of speakers, but also in the number of countries in which it is the dominant language.

Modern Spanish, from approximately the 16th century on, evolved from what was known as Old Spanish, spoken on the Iberian Peninsula from the 10th century until roughly the beginning of the 15th century.

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Spanish of the 16th and 17th centuries is sometimes called “classical” Spanish, referring to the literary accomplishments of that period.

It is not customary to speak of a “middle” stage in the development of Spanish. Castilian Spanish originated, after the decline of the Roman Empire, as a continuation of spoken Latin in the Cantabrian Mountains, in northern Spain, in the 8th and 9th centuries.

With the *Reconquista*, the northern dialect spread to the south, replacing or absorbing the provincial dialects, and borrowing massively from the vocabulary of Moorish Arabic and influenced by Mozarabic (the Romance speech of Christians living in Moorish territory) and medieval Judeo-Spanish (Ladino).

Interesting fact: The **standard Spanish** language is also called *Castilian* (‘castellano’ in Spanish) – as defined by the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (*Spanish Royal Academy*), the official entity that guarantees a unified, standard, version of the Spanish language and of its written form. Even though spoken Spanish is not identical in the different regions of Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries, the Real Academia de la Lengua Española sets the rules to follow in order to speak and write in a way that is accepted by all the different Spanish speakers.

Spanish is the official language of: Spain, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, Guatemala, Cuba, Bolivia, Honduras, Paraguay, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Equatorial Guinea.

Spanish is the main or only language of communication, yet not the official language (by legislation): Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Uruguay.

Spanish is one of the official languages of Puerto Rico, with English as the other official language.



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Did You Know?

Approximately 337 languages are spoken or signed by the population of the United States, of which 176 are indigenous to the area. 52 languages formerly spoken in the country's territory are now extinct. English is the **de facto** national language of the United States, with 82% of the population claiming it as a mother tongue. However, **no official language** exists at the federal level.

Spanish is the second most common language in the United States, and is spoken by over 12% of the population. The United States holds the world's fifth largest Spanish-speaking population, outnumbered only by Mexico, Spain, Argentina, and Colombia.

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"Working with Adriana Adarve was such a professional and smooth experience that I had no trouble trusting her competence and integrity. I am so glad to have this professional resource available in Asheville, NC, to support my multilingual website development company."

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