

LIN105

LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD



Download on the
App Store



GET IT ON
Google Play

Course video is available on our app

lanetonline.com

Course code: LIN 105
Course title: Languages of the World
Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Exploring Living and Dead Languages of the World

Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages

Series 3: Language Classification, Status, and Functions

Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context

Series 5: Language Families and Universals: Defining Characteristics

Proposed Outline for Series 1

Part .1 Understanding Living Languages

- **1.1.1 Definition and Characteristics of Living Languages**
- **1.1.2 Examples of Major Living Languages Worldwide**
- **1.1.3 Functions and Roles of Living Languages in Society**

Part .2 Exploring Dead Languages

- **1.2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Dead Languages**
- **1.2.2 Historical Examples of Dead Languages**
- **1.2.3 Causes of Language Death**

Part .3 Comparative Insights: Living vs Dead Languages

- **1.3.1 Key Differences in Structure and Usage**
- **1.3.2 Cultural and Historical Significance of Both Categories**
- **1.3.3 Lessons from Language Preservation and Loss**

Part .4 Global Relevance of Living and Dead Languages

- **1.4.1 Contribution to Human Diversity**
- **1.4.2 Linguistic Heritage and Identity**
- **1.4.3 Implications for Language Study and Universals**



Introduction

Languages are central to human identity and culture, shaping the way societies communicate, preserve knowledge, and express diversity. Some languages thrive with millions of speakers, while others fade into history, leaving behind traces of their existence in texts, inscriptions, and traditions. By studying both living and dead languages, learners gain insight into the dynamic nature of human communication and the factors that sustain or diminish linguistic vitality. This Series sets the foundation for appreciating the global tapestry of languages within the broader course *Languages of the World*.

The aim of this Series is to equip you with the ability to define, explain, and analyse the characteristics of living and dead languages, to evaluate their roles in society, and to compare their significance in shaping human diversity and cultural heritage.

We shall commence this Series by examining the meaning and features of living languages, including their functions and examples across the world. Next, we will explore dead languages, considering their defining characteristics, historical examples, and the causes of language death. Following that, we will compare living and dead languages, highlighting their differences, cultural importance, and lessons for preservation. Finally, we will conclude by situating both categories within a global context, emphasising their contribution to human diversity, linguistic heritage, and the study of language universals.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 1.1** define the concept of living languages and identify their key characteristics,
- **SLO 1.2** explain the societal functions and roles of living languages with relevant examples,
- **SLO 1.3** define the concept of dead languages and outline their distinguishing features,
- **SLO 1.4** analyse historical examples of dead languages and evaluate the causes of language death,
- **SLO 1.5** compare living and dead languages by highlighting structural and functional differences,
- **SLO 1.6** evaluate the cultural and historical significance of both living and dead languages, and
- **SLO 1.7** assess the global relevance of living and dead languages in relation to human diversity and linguistic heritage.



1.1 Understanding Living Languages

1.1.1 Definition and characteristics of living languages

A **living language** is a language that is actively spoken and used for communication by a community of speakers in daily life. It is characterised by continuous transmission from one generation to the next, adaptability to new contexts, and the ability to evolve through vocabulary expansion and structural change. Living languages are dynamic, reflecting the social, cultural, and technological realities of their speakers.

For example, English, Hausa, Mandarin Chinese, and Swahili are all living languages because they are spoken by millions of people across different regions and continue to adapt to modern needs.

Fill in the blank: A language that is actively spoken and transmitted across generations is called a _____.

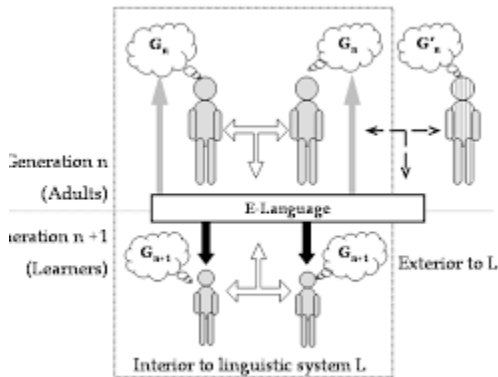


Figure 1.1 Cycle of transmission in living languages

1.1.2 Examples of major living languages worldwide

Living languages vary in size and distribution. Some, such as **Mandarin Chinese**, are spoken by over a billion people, while others, such as **Basque**, are spoken by smaller communities but remain vibrant. The vitality of a living language depends on its number of speakers, its use in education, governance, and media, and its ability to adapt to new domains such as technology.

Fill in the blank: The vitality of a living language depends on its number of speakers and its ability to _____.



Rank	Language	Estimated Total Speakers	Primary Regions
1	English	1.47 Billion	Worldwide (Global Lingua Franca)
2	Mandarin Chinese	1.14 Billion	China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia
3	Hindi	629 Million	India, Nepal, Fiji
4	Spanish	590 Million	Spain, Latin America, USA
5	French	416 Million	France, Africa, Canada

Table 1.1 Examples of major living languages and their approximate speaker populations

1.1.3 Functions and roles of living languages in society

Living languages serve multiple functions in society. They are used for **communication**, which is the exchange of ideas and information; **identity**, which refers to the sense of belonging and cultural heritage; and **education**, which involves transmitting knowledge and values. They also play roles in governance, religion, trade, and entertainment.

For instance, English functions as a global lingua franca in international business and diplomacy, while Yoruba serves as a marker of cultural identity and tradition in Nigeria.

Fill in the blank: When a language is used as a marker of cultural belonging, it serves the function of _____.



Plate 1.1 Everyday use of living languages in society



Pilot questions 1.1

1. Which of the following best defines a living language? a. A language no longer spoken by any community b. A language actively spoken and transmitted across generations c. A language used only in ancient texts d. A language restricted to ceremonial use
2. Which of these is an example of a living language? a. Latin b. Ancient Greek c. Swahili d. Sanskrit
3. What is one key characteristic of living languages? a. They remain unchanged over time b. They are spoken only by elders c. They adapt to new contexts and evolve d. They exist only in written form
4. Which factor contributes most to the vitality of a living language? a. Its age b. Its adaptability to new domains c. Its ceremonial use d. Its historical significance
5. When a language is used to express cultural belonging, which function does it serve? a. Communication b. Identity c. Education d. Entertainment

1.2 Exploring Dead Languages

1.2.1 Definition and characteristics of dead languages

A **dead language** is a language that no longer has native speakers who use it as their first language. Unlike living languages, dead languages are not transmitted naturally from parents to children. They may still be studied, written, or used in specific contexts such as religion, academia, or ceremonial functions, but they lack the vitality of everyday communication.

For example, Latin is considered a dead language because it is no longer spoken as a mother tongue, although it continues to be used in religious and scholarly contexts.

Fill in the blank: A language that no longer has native speakers but may still be studied is called a _____.

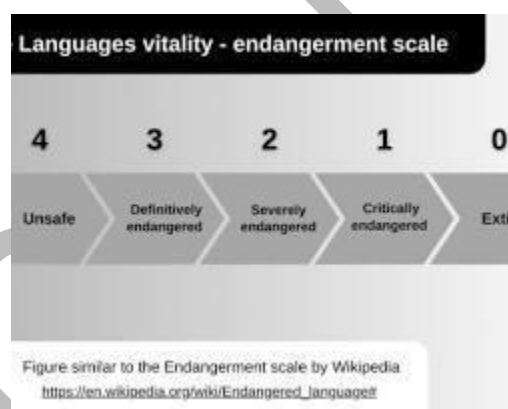


Figure 1.2 Stages of language vitality leading to language death

1.2.2 Historical examples of dead languages



Throughout history, many languages have ceased to be spoken. **Ancient Egyptian**, once the language of a great civilisation, is now studied only through inscriptions and texts. **Sumerian**, the earliest known written language, is no longer spoken but remains significant for understanding early human societies. **Old Norse**, once spoken across Scandinavia, has evolved into modern languages such as Icelandic and Norwegian, leaving its original form extinct.

These examples show that dead languages often provide valuable insights into history, culture, and the development of modern languages.

Fill in the blank: The earliest known written language, now considered dead, is _____.

Language	Primary Region	Historical Contributions
Sumerian	Southern Mesopotamia (Modern-day Iraq)	Credited with the invention of writing (Cuneiform). It provided the first recorded laws, literature (like the <i>Epic of Gilgamesh</i>), and complex mathematics.
Latin	Latium / Roman Empire (Europe, North Africa)	The foundation of the Romance languages (Spanish, French, etc.). It remains the universal language for scientific taxonomy, legal terminology, and Catholic liturgy.
Ancient Greek	Eastern Mediterranean (Greece, Asia Minor)	The language of the foundations of Western thought , including democracy, philosophy (Socrates, Plato), and the origins of many scientific and mathematical principles.

Table 1.2 Selected examples of dead languages and their historical significance

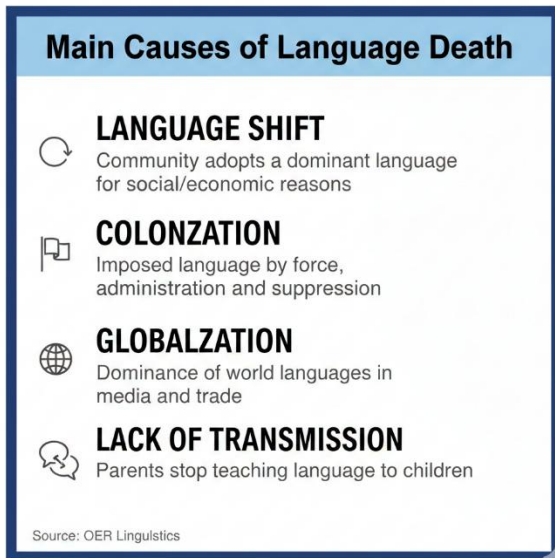
1.2.3 Causes of language death

Languages die for several reasons. One major cause is **language shift**, which occurs when speakers abandon their native language in favour of another that offers greater social or economic advantages. Another cause is **colonisation**, where dominant languages replace indigenous ones. **Globalisation** also contributes, as widely spoken languages overshadow smaller ones. Finally, **lack of transmission** across generations ensures that a language eventually disappears.

For instance, many indigenous languages have died because younger generations adopted dominant national or global languages instead of their ancestral tongues.

Fill in the blank: When speakers abandon their native language for another, the process is called _____.





Box 1.1 Key causes of language death

Pilot questions 1.2

1. Which of the following best defines a dead language? a. A language spoken by millions of people today b. A language no longer spoken as a mother tongue c. A language used only for trade d. A language restricted to one region
2. Which of these is an example of a dead language? a. Swahili b. Mandarin Chinese c. Latin d. Yoruba
3. What is one reason why languages die? a. Increase in speaker population b. Language shift to dominant languages c. Strong cultural identity d. Expansion of vocabulary
4. Which ancient language is considered the earliest known written language? a. Greek b. Sumerian c. Sanskrit d. Hebrew
5. When a language disappears because it is not passed on to younger generations, the cause is: a. Colonisation b. Lack of transmission c. Globalisation d. Language shift

1.3 Comparative Insights: Living vs Dead Languages

1.3.1 Key differences in structure and usage

Living and dead languages differ in both **structure** and **usage**. A **structure** refers to the system of sounds, words, and grammar that makes up a language. Living languages constantly evolve, adding new vocabulary and adapting grammar to meet modern needs. Dead languages, however, remain frozen in the form they had when last spoken, with no natural evolution.

In terms of **usage**, living languages are employed daily in communication, education, governance, and media. Dead languages are limited to scholarly study, religious rituals, or historical analysis.



For example, English is used globally in business and technology, while Latin is studied mainly in academic and religious contexts.

Fill in the blank: A language that no longer evolves because it is not spoken by native communities is called a _____.



Figure 1.3 Structural and usage differences between living and dead languages

1.3.2 Cultural and historical significance of both categories

Both living and dead languages hold immense **cultural significance**, which refers to their role in shaping identity and traditions, and **historical significance**, which refers to their contribution to understanding past societies. Living languages preserve contemporary culture and allow communities to express identity and belonging. Dead languages, on the other hand, provide a window into ancient civilisations, their beliefs, and their ways of life.

For instance, Yoruba continues to express cultural identity in Nigeria today, while Ancient Egyptian helps scholars reconstruct the history of one of the world's earliest civilisations.

Fill in the blank: When a language provides insight into the traditions and beliefs of past societies, it has _____ significance.





Source: OER Linguistics

Plate 1.2 Cultural and historical significance of living and dead languages

1.3.3 Lessons from language preservation and loss

The study of living and dead languages teaches important lessons about **language preservation**, which is the effort to maintain and protect endangered languages, and **language loss**, which occurs when languages die out. Preservation ensures that linguistic diversity is safeguarded, while loss reminds us of the fragility of cultural heritage.

Efforts such as documenting endangered languages, teaching them in schools, and promoting their use in media can help prevent language death. The disappearance of many indigenous languages highlights the need for active preservation strategies.

Fill in the blank: The effort to maintain and protect endangered languages is called language _____.

Aspect	Key Lessons & Insights
The Tipping Point	A language is considered "at-risk" the moment intergenerational transmission stops—when parents no longer speak the language to their children in the home.
Cultural Identity	Language is more than communication; it is a repository of traditional knowledge , history, and unique worldviews. Loss of language often leads to a loss of cultural identity.



Aspect	Key Lessons & Insights
Economic Pressure	Globalization and economic necessity often drive "language shift," where communities prioritize a dominant language for jobs, sometimes at the expense of their heritage tongue.
Revitalization	Success stories (like Modern Hebrew or Māori) show that revitalization requires immersion , community agency, and institutional support, not just academic documentation.
Digital Legacy	While digital archives can preserve the <i>sounds</i> and <i>grammar</i> of a language, a language only truly "lives" if it is used in spontaneous, daily social contexts .

Box 1.2 Lessons from language preservation and loss

Pilot questions 1.3

- Which of the following best describes the structure of a dead language? a. Constantly evolving with new vocabulary b. Frozen in its last spoken form c. Used daily in communication d. Adapted for modern technology
- Which of these is an example of cultural significance of a living language? a. Preserving identity and traditions in daily use b. Providing insight into ancient civilisations c. Remaining static in grammar and vocabulary d. Being studied only in universities
- What is one historical significance of dead languages? a. They help reconstruct past societies and beliefs b. They are used in modern governance c. They evolve with new words d. They dominate global trade
- What term refers to the effort to maintain and protect endangered languages? a. Language loss b. Language preservation c. Language shift d. Language extinction
- Which of the following is a lesson from studying living and dead languages? a. Language diversity is fragile and requires preservation b. Dead languages are irrelevant to modern society c. Living languages never changed. Language death is always unavoidable

1.4 Global Relevance of Living and Dead Languages

1.4.1 Contribution to human diversity

Languages are more than tools of communication; they are carriers of culture, identity, and worldview. A **living language** contributes to human diversity by allowing communities to express unique traditions, values, and perspectives. A **dead language**, though no longer spoken, enriches diversity by preserving historical records and offering insights into ancient civilisations. Together, they form a tapestry of human experience across time.



For example, while Hausa continues to shape cultural identity in West Africa, Latin preserves the intellectual heritage of Europe.

Fill in the blank: A language that enriches human diversity by preserving historical records is called a _____.

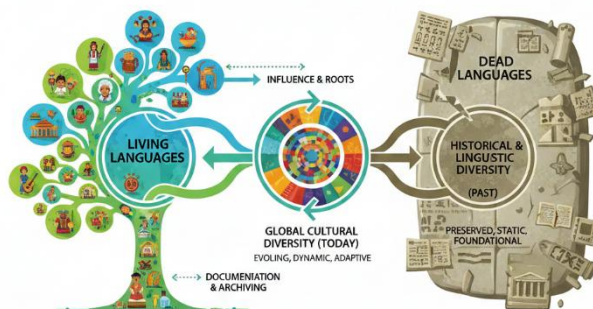


Figure 1.4 Contribution of living and dead languages to human diversity

1.4.2 Linguistic heritage and identity

Linguistic heritage refers to the collective body of languages that shape human history and identity. Living languages maintain heritage by transmitting traditions and values across generations. Dead languages, on the other hand, serve as archives of past societies, helping us reconstruct identities that might otherwise be lost.

For instance, Sanskrit preserves philosophical and religious traditions in South Asia, while Swahili continues to express East African identity in modern contexts.

Fill in the blank: The collective body of languages that shape human history and identity is called _____.



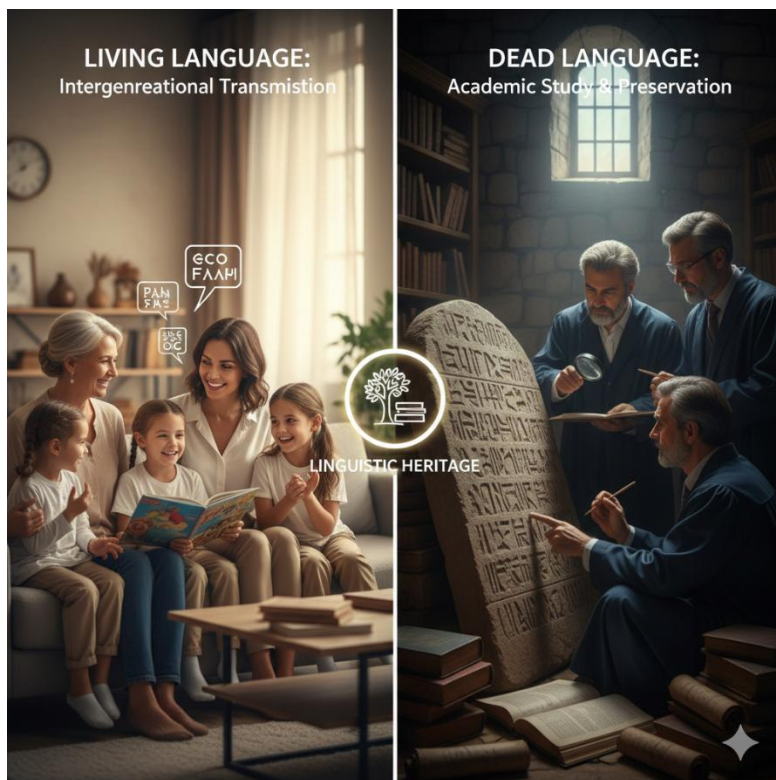


Plate 1.3 Linguistic heritage expressed through living and dead languages

1.4.3 Implications for language study and universals

Studying both living and dead languages has important implications for understanding **language universals**, which are features common to all human languages. Living languages reveal how universals operate in contemporary communication, while dead languages show how these features existed in ancient contexts. Together, they help linguists identify patterns, trace language evolution, and evaluate the resilience of human communication.

For example, the study of verb systems in modern English and Ancient Greek highlights universal tendencies in tense and aspect.

Fill in the blank: Features that are common to all human languages are called language _____.

Category	The Universal Rule	Explanation
Grammar	Nouns & Verbs	Every language distinguishes between "things/people" (nouns) and "actions/states" (verbs).



Category	The Universal Rule	Explanation
Phonology	Consonants & Vowels	No language consists entirely of one or the other; they all use a combination of both to build meaning.
Logic	Negation	Every language has a way to say "no" or express that something is not the case.
Social	Pronouns	All languages have a way to distinguish the speaker ("I") from the person being spoken to ("you").
Syntax	Hierarchical Structure	Words aren't just strings; they are organized into nested phrases (e.g., "The big dog" acts as one unit).

Box 1.3 Implications of studying living and dead languages

Pilot questions 1.4

- Which of the following best describes the contribution of living languages to human diversity? a. Preserving historical records b. Expressing cultural traditions and identity c. Remaining static in grammar d. Being studied only in universities
- Which of these is an example of linguistic heritage preserved by a dead language? a. Swahili identity in East Africa b. Sanskrit philosophical traditions in South Asia c. Hausa spoken in West Africa d. English used in global trade
- What term refers to features that are common to all human languages? a. Language heritage b. Language universals c. Language identity d. Language shift
- Which of the following is an implication of studying both living and dead languages? a. Identifying patterns and universals in human communication b. Ensuring languages remain unchanged c. Limiting study to modern contexts only d. Avoiding historical analysis
- When a language serves as an archive of past societies, it is considered to have: a. Cultural significance b. Linguistic heritage c. Educational function d. Entertainment value

Series Summary

This Series has introduced you to the significance of studying both living and dead languages, highlighting their role in shaping human communication, culture, and history. We began by examining the definition and characteristics of living languages, their vitality, and the functions they serve in society. We then explored dead languages, considering their defining features, historical examples, and the causes of language death. Following that, we compared living and dead languages, focusing on their structural and functional differences, cultural and historical importance, and lessons from preservation and loss. Finally, we discussed their global relevance, emphasising contributions to human diversity, linguistic heritage, and the study of language universals.



By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to define and explain the features of living and dead languages, analyse examples and causes of language death, compare both categories in terms of structure and significance, and evaluate their global relevance. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you are equipped to assess how languages contribute to diversity, identity, and heritage, and to apply these insights in understanding the universals that underpin human communication.

Glossary of Terms

- **Communication:** The process of exchanging ideas, information, or feelings between people using spoken or written language.
- **Cultural significance:** The importance of a language in expressing traditions, values, and identity within a community.
- **Dead language:** A language that no longer has native speakers and is not used for everyday communication, though it may still be studied or used in limited contexts.
- **Historical significance:** The value of a language in helping us understand past societies, their beliefs, and their way of life.
- **Identity:** The sense of belonging and cultural heritage expressed through the use of a language.
- **Language loss:** The disappearance of a language when it is no longer spoken or transmitted to future generations.
- **Language preservation:** Efforts made to maintain and protect endangered languages so they continue to be spoken and passed on.
- **Language shift:** The process by which speakers abandon their native language in favour of another language that offers greater social or economic advantages.
- **Language universals:** Features that are common to all human languages, such as the use of nouns and verbs.
- **Linguistic heritage:** The collective body of languages, both living and dead, that shape human history, identity, and culture.
- **Living language:** A language that is actively spoken and transmitted across generations, adapting to new contexts and evolving over time.
- **Structure:** The system of sounds, words, and grammar that makes up a language.
- **Usage:** The way a language is employed in society, including communication, education, governance, and cultural practices.

Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. Which of the following best defines a living language? a. A language no longer spoken by any community b. A language actively spoken and transmitted across generations c. A language used only in ancient texts d. A language restricted to ceremonial use (Linked to SLO 2.1)



2. Which of these is an example of a dead language? a. Swahili b. Latin c. Hausa d. Mandarin Chinese (Linked to SLO 2.3)
3. What term refers to the effort to maintain and protect endangered languages? a. Language loss b. Language preservation c. Language shift d. Language extinction (Linked to SLO 2.7)
4. Which of the following is a cause of language death? a. Increase in speaker population b. Language shift to dominant languages c. Strong cultural identity d. Expansion of vocabulary (Linked to SLO 2.4)
5. Features that are common to all human languages are called: a. Language heritage b. Language universals c. Language identity d. Language shift (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define a dead language and give one example. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
7. Explain one function of living languages in society. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
8. Identify one lesson that can be learned from the study of language preservation and loss. (Linked to SLO 2.6)
9. Compare briefly the usage of living and dead languages. (Linked to SLO 2.5)
10. State one implication of studying both living and dead languages for understanding language universals. (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the causes of language death, providing examples from the Series. (Linked to SLO 2.4)
12. Evaluate the cultural and historical significance of both living and dead languages, using examples to support your points. (Linked to SLO 2.6)
13. Assess the global relevance of living and dead languages in relation to human diversity and linguistic heritage. (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. b. A language actively spoken and transmitted across generations
2. b. Latin
3. b. Language preservation
4. b. Language shift to dominant languages
5. b. Language universals

Short-Answer Questions

6. A dead language is one that no longer has native speakers and is not used for everyday communication. Example: Latin.
7. One function of living languages is communication, which allows people to exchange ideas and information.



8. A key lesson is that languages are fragile and require preservation efforts to safeguard cultural heritage.
9. Living languages are used daily in communication, education, and governance, while dead languages are limited to scholarly study or ceremonial use.
10. Studying both categories helps linguists identify universal features such as verb systems and sentence structures.

Long-Answer Questions

11. **Basic response:** Causes of language death include language shift, colonisation, globalisation, and lack of transmission. For example, many indigenous languages have disappeared because younger generations adopted dominant national languages. **Value-added response:** Beyond these causes, learners may consider socio-political factors such as suppression of minority languages, economic migration, and the influence of digital media, which often favours global languages like English.
12. **Basic response:** Living languages are culturally significant because they express identity and traditions, while dead languages are historically significant as they provide insights into ancient civilisations. For example, Yoruba expresses Nigerian identity, while Ancient Egyptian reveals the history of early civilisation. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may extend this by discussing how living languages adapt to modern contexts such as technology, while dead languages influence modern vocabulary, scientific terminology, and religious practices.
13. **Basic response:** Living and dead languages are globally relevant because they contribute to human diversity, preserve linguistic heritage, and help in the study of universals. **Value-added response:** Learners may go further by evaluating how language diversity supports multiculturalism, how heritage languages strengthen identity politics, and how universals inform artificial intelligence and computational linguistics.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 1]

Pilot questions 1.1

1. b. A language actively spoken and transmitted across generations
2. c. Swahili
3. c. They adapt to new contexts and evolve
4. b. Its adaptability to new domains
5. b. Identity

Pilot questions 1.2

1. b. A language no longer spoken as a mother tongue
2. c. Latin
3. b. Language shift to dominant languages
4. b. Sumerian
5. b. Lack of transmission

Pilot questions 1.3



1. b. Frozen in its last spoken form
2. a. Preserving identity and traditions in daily use
3. a. They help reconstruct past societies and beliefs
4. b. Language preservation
5. a. Language diversity is fragile and requires preservation

Pilot questions 1.4

1. b. Expressing cultural traditions and identity
2. b. Sanskrit philosophical traditions in South Asia
3. b. Language universals
4. a. Identifying patterns and universals in human communication
5. b. Linguistic heritage

References and Attributions [Series 1]

This section compiles all references and attributions for Series 1: *Living and Dead Languages of the World*. It includes suggested open educational resources (OERs) and notes on AI-generated illustration prompts. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) guidelines for clarity and consistency.

General References

- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, L. (2017). *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- UNESCO. (2010). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- Ethnologue. (2023). *Languages of the World*. SIL International. Retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com>

Illustration Attributions

- *Figure 1.1 Cycle of transmission in living languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing three generations passing down a language through speech and writing.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language transmission diagram OER”
- *Table 1.1 Examples of major living languages and their approximate speaker populations*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing five major living languages with approximate speaker populations.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “list of major living languages with speaker population OER”
- *Plate 1.1 Everyday use of living languages in society*



- AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing people speaking in classrooms, markets, and homes to represent living languages.”
- Suggested OER search string: “living languages everyday use OER image”
- *Figure 1.2 Stages of language vitality leading to language death*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing a timeline of language vitality from living to endangered to dead.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language vitality stages diagram OER”
- *Table 1.2 Selected examples of dead languages and their historical significance*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing three dead languages, their regions, and historical contributions.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “examples of dead languages with historical significance OER”
- *Box 1.1 Key causes of language death*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising causes of language death: shift, colonisation, globalisation, lack of transmission.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “causes of language death summary OER”
- *Figure 1.3 Structural and usage differences between living and dead languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing living languages evolving with new words versus dead languages remaining static.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “living vs dead languages comparison diagram OER”
- *Plate 1.2 Cultural and historical significance of living and dead languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing people using a living language in cultural practices alongside ancient inscriptions of a dead language.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “living and dead languages cultural historical significance OER image”
- *Box 1.2 Lessons from language preservation and loss*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising lessons from language preservation and loss.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language preservation and loss summary OER”
- *Figure 1.4 Contribution of living and dead languages to human diversity*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing living languages linked to cultural diversity and dead languages linked to historical diversity.”



- Suggested OER search string: “living and dead languages contribution to diversity OER diagram”
- *Plate 1.3 Linguistic heritage expressed through living and dead languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing a family speaking a living language and scholars studying inscriptions of a dead language.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “linguistic heritage living and dead languages OER image”
- *Box 1.3 Implications of studying living and dead languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising implications of studying living and dead languages for universals.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language universals summary OER”

Course code: LIN 105

Course title: Languages of the World

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Exploring Living and Dead Languages of the World

Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages

Series 3: Language Classification, Status, and Functions

Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context

Series 5: Language Families and Universals: Defining Characteristics

Proposed Outline for Series 2

Part .1 Origins of Languages

- **2.1.1 Theories of language origin**
- **2.1.2 Early evidence of language use**
- **2.1.3 Transition from oral traditions to written forms**

Part .2 Distribution of Languages Across the World

- **2.2.1 Factors influencing language spread**
- **2.2.2 Regional and global language patterns**
- **2.2.3 Case studies of language distribution**



Part .3 Relationships Among Languages

- **2.3.1 Concept of language families**
- **2.3.2 Genetic and typological relationships**
- **2.3.3 Examples of related languages**

Part .4 Implications of Origins, Distribution, and Relationships

- **2.4.1 Insights into human migration and history**
- **2.4.2 Contribution to linguistic diversity**
- **2.4.3 Relevance for modern language study**

Introduction

Languages do not simply appear in isolation; they have origins that connect them to human history, patterns of distribution that reveal how communities spread across regions, and relationships that show how languages are linked to one another. Understanding these aspects allows us to see languages not only as tools of communication but also as evidence of migration, cultural contact, and shared heritage. This Series builds on our earlier exploration of living and dead languages by focusing on where languages come from, how they are spread, and how they relate to one another.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to explain theories of language origin, analyse the factors that influence language distribution, and evaluate the relationships among languages in terms of families and typologies.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the origins of languages, considering theories and early evidence of language use. Next, we will examine the distribution of languages across the world, looking at the factors that shape regional and global patterns. Following that, we will study the relationships among languages, focusing on families, genetic links, and typological similarities. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the implications of origins, distribution, and relationships, highlighting their relevance for understanding human migration, diversity, and modern language study.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 2.1** define major theories of language origin and identify early evidence of language use,
- **SLO 2.2** explain how oral traditions transitioned into written forms,
- **SLO 2.3** analyse the factors that influence the distribution of languages across regions and globally,



- **SLO 2.4** evaluate case studies of language distribution to illustrate regional and global patterns,
- **SLO 2.5** define the concept of language families and distinguish between genetic and typological relationships,
- **SLO 2.6** illustrate examples of related languages within families and typologies, and
- **SLO 2.7** assess the implications of language origins, distribution, and relationships for human migration, diversity, and modern linguistic study.

2.1 Origins of Languages

2.1.1 Theories of language origin

The question of how human language began has fascinated scholars for centuries. Several **theories of language origin** have been proposed, each attempting to explain how humans developed the ability to communicate through complex systems of sounds and symbols. The **bow-wow theory** suggests that language began as imitations of natural sounds, while the **pooh-pooh theory** argues that language originated from instinctive emotional cries. Another perspective, the **ding-dong theory**, proposes that there is a natural connection between sounds and meanings. More recent approaches emphasise the role of social interaction and cognitive development in shaping language.

Fill in the blank: The theory that language began as imitations of natural sounds is called the _____ theory.

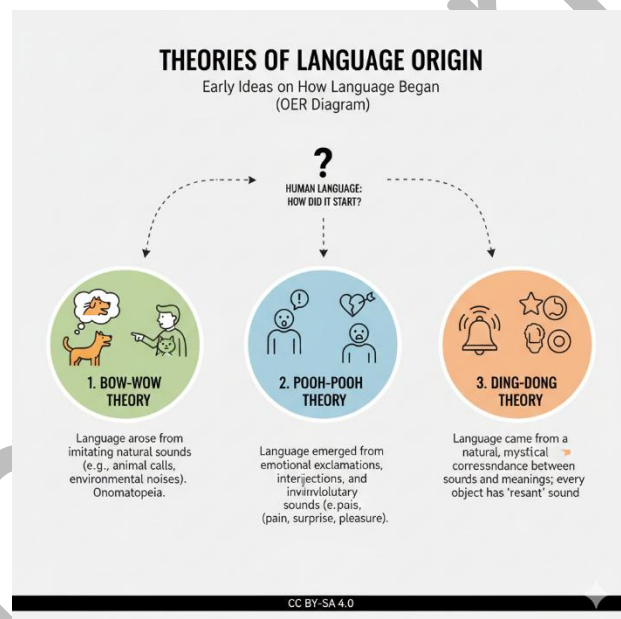


Figure 2.1 Major theories of language origin

2.1.2 Early evidence of language use



Evidence of early language use is found in archaeological records, cave paintings, and symbolic artefacts. These suggest that humans used **proto-language**, which refers to simple systems of communication before the development of fully structured languages. Proto-languages likely included gestures, sounds, and rudimentary symbols. Over time, these systems became more complex, leading to the emergence of distinct languages.

Fill in the blank: Simple systems of communication before the development of fully structured languages are called _____.



Plate 2.1 Early evidence of human communication

2.1.3 Transition from oral traditions to written forms

Human societies initially relied on **oral traditions**, which are spoken accounts passed down from generation to generation. Oral traditions preserved myths, histories, and cultural practices. The invention of **writing systems**, however, marked a major transition in language history. Writing allowed for the recording of knowledge, the preservation of ideas across time, and the expansion of communication beyond immediate communities. Examples include cuneiform in Mesopotamia and hieroglyphics in Ancient Egypt.

Fill in the blank: The invention of _____ marked the transition from oral traditions to recorded language.

Writing System	Region of Origin	Approximate Date	Key Characteristics
Cuneiform	Mesopotamia (Sumer)	~3400 BCE	Wedge-shaped marks made on clay tablets; transitioned from pictographs to abstract symbols.
Hieroglyphics	Ancient Egypt	~3200 BCE	Formal system using pictorial symbols to represent sounds and ideas.



Writing System	Region of Origin	Approximate Date	Key Characteristics
Jiahu Symbols	China (Yellow River Valley)	~6000 BCE	Early proto-writing carved into tortoise shells (later evolving into Oracle Bone script).
Indus Script	Indus Valley (South Asia)	~2600 BCE	Short strings of symbols found on seals; remains largely undeciphered today.
Olman / Maya	Mesoamerica	~900 BCE	Complex logosyllabic system used for recording lineage, astronomy, and history.
Phoenician	Levant (Eastern Mediterranean)	~1050 BCE	One of the first alphabetic systems, influencing the Greek and Latin alphabets.

Table 2.1 Examples of early writing systems and their regions

Pilot questions 2.1

1. Which theory of language origin suggests that language began as imitations of natural sounds? a. Pooh-pooh theory b. Bow-wow theory c. Ding-dong theory d. Gesture theory
2. What term refers to simple systems of communication before the development of fully structured languages? a. Proto-language b. Dialect c. Vernacular d. Script
3. Which of the following is an example of early evidence of language use? a. Modern dictionaries b. Cave paintings and symbolic artefacts c. Printed books d. Digital communication
4. What marked the transition from oral traditions to recorded language? a. The invention of writing systems b. The spread of spoken dialects c. The development of proto-languages d. The use of emotional cries
5. Which early writing system was used in Mesopotamia? a. Hieroglyphics b. Cuneiform c. Sanskrit d. Greek alphabet

2.2 Distribution of Languages Across the World

2.2.1 Factors influencing language spread

The spread of languages across the world is shaped by several **factors**, which are conditions or influences that determine how languages move and grow. One major factor is **migration**, where communities carry their languages to new regions. Another is **trade**, which encourages the adoption of languages for communication between groups. **Colonisation** also played a significant



role, as dominant powers imposed their languages on indigenous populations. In modern times, **globalisation** and **technology** have accelerated the spread of languages such as English, Spanish, and Mandarin.

Fill in the blank: When communities carry their languages to new regions, the process is called _____.



Figure 2.2 Factors influencing the spread of languages

2.2.2 Regional and global language patterns

Languages are not evenly distributed across the world. Some regions are highly diverse, while others are dominated by a few languages. For example, Africa is home to thousands of languages, reflecting its rich cultural diversity. In contrast, Europe has fewer languages but many are widely spoken across national boundaries. Globally, languages such as English, Arabic, and Mandarin serve as **lingua francas**, which are languages used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues.

Fill in the blank: A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues is called a _____.

Region	Dominant/Major Languages	Examples of High Diversity	Key Pattern
Africa	Arabic, English, French, Swahili, Hausa	Nigeria (500+ languages), Cameroon, DRC	High levels of indigenous linguistic diversity alongside colonial "official" languages.



Region	Dominant/Major Languages	Examples of High Diversity	Key Pattern
Europe	English, Spanish, Russian, French, German	Caucasus region (e.g., Dagestan), Basque Country	Dominated by large Indo-European language families with few linguistic "islands."
Asia	Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Japanese	Papua New Guinea (800+), Indonesia, India	Massive speaker populations for national languages with thousands of local dialects.
Americas	Spanish, English, Portuguese, French	Quechua (Andes), Guarani, Navajo	Dominated by European languages, but significant clusters of indigenous survival.

Table 2.2 Examples of regional and global language patterns

2.2.3 Case studies of language distribution

Case studies provide concrete examples of how languages are distributed. In Nigeria, over 500 languages are spoken, with Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo serving as major regional languages. In South America, Spanish and Portuguese dominate due to colonisation, while indigenous languages such as Quechua remain significant in cultural contexts. In Asia, Mandarin Chinese has the largest number of speakers, while Hindi and Arabic also play major roles in regional communication.

Fill in the blank: In Nigeria, three major regional languages are Hausa, _____, and Igbo.



GLOBAL LANGUAGE DIVERSITY: A WORLD MAP

Patterns of Distribution (OER Image)

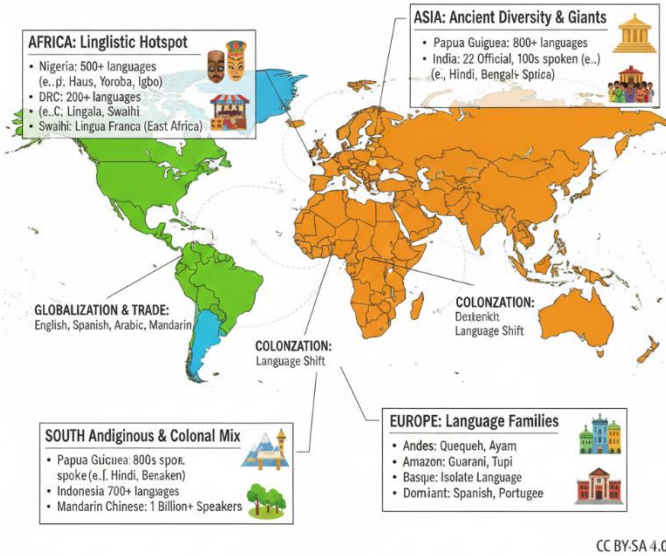


Plate 2.2 Global distribution of selected languages

Pilot questions 2.2

- Which of the following is a factor influencing language spread? a. Migration b. Silence c. Isolation d. Forgetfulness
- What term refers to a language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues? a. Dialect b. Vernacular c. Lingua franca d. Proto-language
- Which region is known for having thousands of languages, reflecting its cultural diversity? a. Europe b. Africa c. South America d. Asia
- Which languages dominate South America due to colonisation? a. Hausa and Yoruba b. Spanish and Portuguese c. English and French d. Mandarin and Hindi
- In Nigeria, the three major regional languages are Hausa, Yoruba, and _____.

2.3 Relationships Among Languages

2.3.1 Concept of language families

Languages are often grouped into **language families**, which are collections of languages that share a common ancestral origin. A **language family** is defined as a group of languages that have evolved from a single earlier language, known as a **proto-language**. For example, the Indo-European family includes English, French, Hindi, and Russian, all of which trace back to Proto-Indo-European. Recognising language families helps linguists organise the world's languages and trace their historical development.



Fill in the blank: A group of languages that share a common ancestral origin is called a language _____.

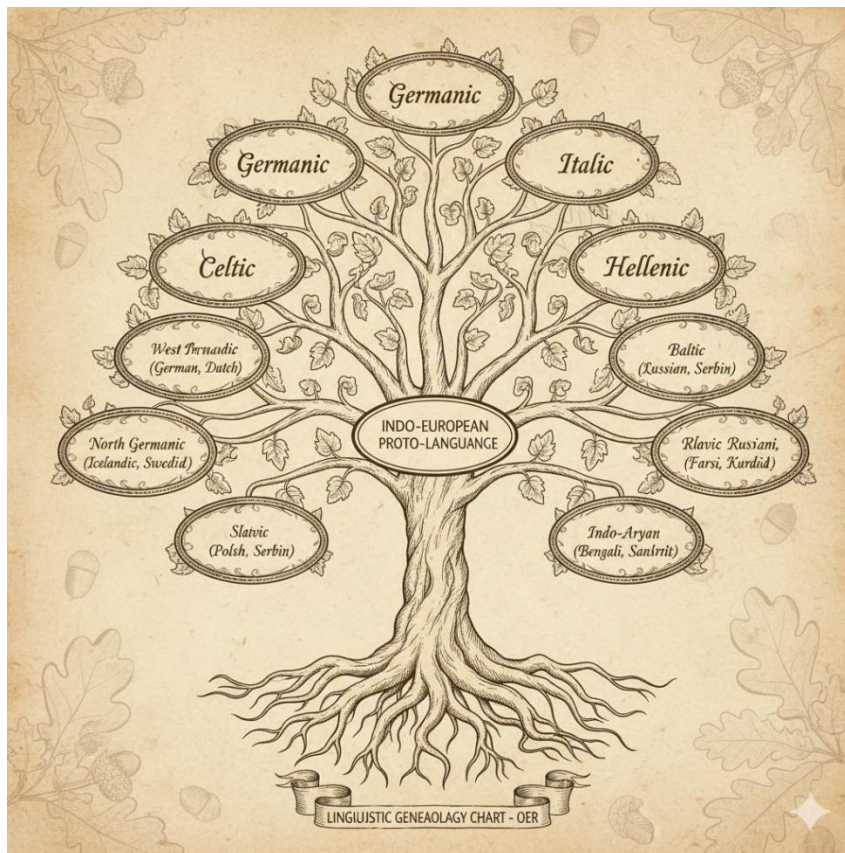


Figure 2.3 Example of a language family

2.3.2 Genetic and typological relationships

Languages can be related in two main ways: **genetic relationships** and **typological relationships**. A **genetic relationship** means that languages share a common ancestor, such as Spanish and Italian, which both evolved from Latin. A **typological relationship**, on the other hand, refers to



similarities in structure or features, even if the languages do not share ancestry. For example, Turkish and Japanese are typologically similar because they both use agglutination, but they are not genetically related.

Fill in the blank: When languages share similarities in structure but not ancestry, they are said to have _____ relationships.

Feature	Genetic Relationship	Typological Relationship
Basis of Connection	Shared "biological" ancestry; descended from a common proto-language.	Shared structural features (grammar, word order, sounds) regardless of history.
Evidence Used	Cognates (related words like <i>mother/madre</i>) and systematic sound shifts.	Word order (e.g., Subject-Object-Verb), phonology, or morphological patterns.
Stability	Usually permanent; languages don't "change" their ancestors.	Can change over time due to contact or internal evolution.
Key Example	Spanish – Italian (Both descended from Latin/Indo-European).	Turkish – Japanese (Both use Subject-Object-Verb order and agglutination).
Other Examples	English – German; Hindi – Bengali.	English – Chinese (Both use Subject-Verb-Object and have low inflection).

Table 2.3 Examples of genetic and typological relationships

2.3.3 Examples of related languages

Examples of related languages help illustrate these concepts. Within the Indo-European family, English and German are related through their Germanic roots, while Hindi and Persian are related through their Indo-Iranian roots. In the Niger-Congo family, Yoruba and Igbo are related as part of the West African branch. These examples show how languages can be grouped into families and sub-families, reflecting both genetic and typological connections.

Fill in the blank: English and German are related through their _____ roots.



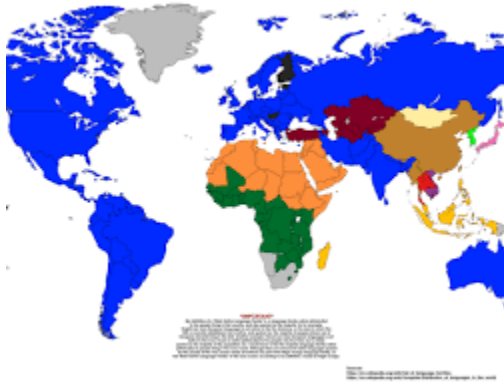


Plate 2.3 Global examples of related languages

Pilot questions 2.3

1. What term refers to a group of languages that share a common ancestral origin? a. Dialect group b. Language family c. Typological set d. Vernacular cluster
2. Which of the following is an example of a genetic relationship? a. Turkish and Japanese b. Spanish and Italian c. Yoruba and English d. Mandarin and Swahili
3. When languages share similarities in structure but not ancestry, they are said to have: a. Genetic relationships b. Typological relationships c. Dialectal relationships d. Proto-language links
4. English and German are related through their: a. Romance roots b. Germanic roots c. Indo-Iranian roots d. Niger-Congo roots
5. Yoruba and Igbo are related as part of which language family? a. Indo-European b. Niger-Congo c. Sino-Tibetan d. Afro-Asiatic

2.4 Implications of Origins, Distribution, and Relationships

2.4.1 Insights into human migration and history

The study of language origins, distribution, and relationships provides valuable insights into **human migration**, which refers to the movement of people from one region to another, and **history**, which is the record of human activities and development over time. By tracing how languages spread and evolved, linguists can reconstruct patterns of migration and cultural contact. For example, the spread of Indo-European languages across Europe and Asia reflects ancient movements of populations and their interactions.

Fill in the blank: The movement of people from one region to another, often reflected in language spread, is called _____.



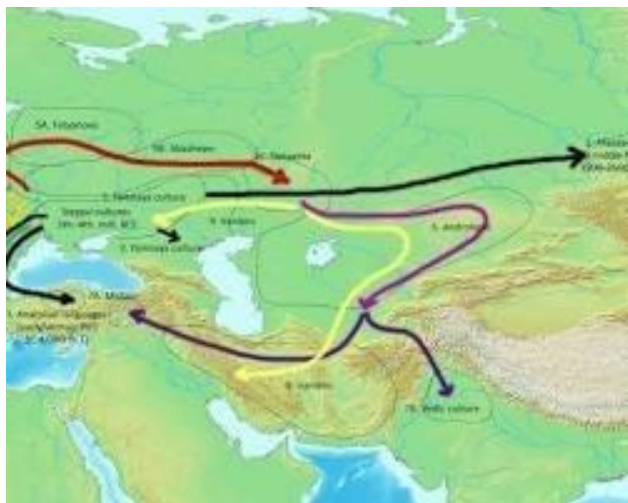


Figure 2.4 Language distribution as evidence of human migration

2.4.2 Contribution to linguistic diversity

Languages contribute to **linguistic diversity**, which refers to the variety of languages spoken across the world. This diversity reflects cultural richness and provides multiple perspectives on human experience. Studying how languages originated and spread helps us appreciate the reasons behind this diversity. For instance, Africa's thousands of languages demonstrate how geography, migration, and cultural practices shape linguistic variety.

Fill in the blank: The variety of languages spoken across the world is referred to as _____ diversity.

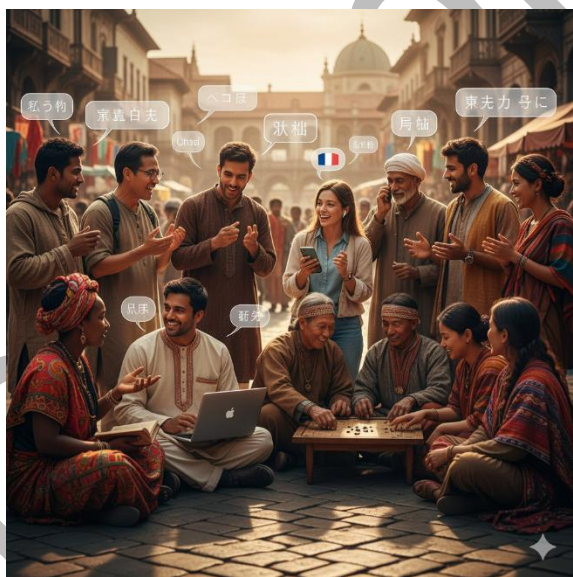


Plate 2.4 Linguistic diversity across cultures

2.4.3 Relevance for modern language study

The implications of studying language origins, distribution, and relationships extend to **modern language study**, which involves analysing current languages to understand their structure, history, and role in society. By examining how languages are related, linguists can design effective teaching methods, preserve endangered languages, and develop tools for translation and communication. For example, recognising genetic links between languages helps in comparative studies, while understanding typological similarities aids in designing language learning strategies.

Fill in the blank: Recognising genetic links between languages is particularly useful in _____ studies.

Field	Practical Implications & Benefits
Language Teaching	Facilitates "Positive Transfer" where learners use knowledge of their native tongue to master related languages (e.g., using Dutch to learn English).
Preservation	Helps linguists document endangered "Isolates" or rare branches before they disappear, ensuring the world's mental diversity is archived.
Translation & AI	Enables more accurate "Neural Machine Translation" by grouping languages with similar syntax (Typology) to improve how computers process meaning.
Global Diplomacy	Fosters cross-cultural empathy by highlighting shared ancestral roots, showing how seemingly different cultures are historically linked.

Box 2.1 Implications of origins, distribution, and relationships for modern language study

Pilot questions 2.4

1. What term refers to the movement of people from one region to another, often reflected in language spread? a. Colonisation b. Migration c. Globalisation d. Transmission
2. The variety of languages spoken across the world is referred to as: a. Language heritage b. Linguistic diversity c. Language universals d. Language shift
3. Which continent is known for having thousands of languages that demonstrate linguistic diversity? a. Europe b. Africa c. Asia d. South America
4. Recognising genetic links between languages is particularly useful in: a. Comparative studies b. Oral traditions c. Ceremonial practices d. Trade negotiations
5. Which of the following is one implication of studying language origins, distribution, and relationships? a. Designing effective teaching methods b. Preventing language evolution c. Eliminating linguistic diversity d. Restricting translation tools



Series Summary

This Series has guided you through the origins, distribution, and relationships of languages, showing how they provide valuable insights into human history, culture, and communication. We began by examining theories of language origin, early evidence of language use, and the transition from oral traditions to written forms. We then explored the distribution of languages across the world, considering the factors that influence their spread, regional and global patterns, and case studies that illustrate diversity. Following that, we studied relationships among languages, focusing on the concept of language families, genetic and typological links, and examples of related languages. Finally, we assessed the implications of these origins, distributions, and relationships, highlighting their relevance for understanding migration, diversity, and modern language study.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to define and explain theories of language origin, analyse factors influencing language distribution, evaluate case studies, distinguish between genetic and typological relationships, and assess the broader implications for human migration and linguistic diversity. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you are equipped to apply these insights in modern language study, recognising how languages connect communities across time and space.

Glossary of Terms

- **Colonisation:** The process by which a dominant power imposes its language and culture on indigenous populations.
- **Genetic relationship:** A connection between languages that share a common ancestral origin, such as Spanish and Italian evolving from Latin.
- **Language family:** A group of languages that have developed from a single ancestral language, known as a proto-language.
- **Lingua franca:** A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues, often for trade or global interaction.
- **Linguistic diversity:** The variety of languages spoken across the world, reflecting cultural richness and human experience.
- **Migration:** The movement of people from one region to another, often carrying their languages with them.
- **Modern language study:** The analysis of current languages to understand their structure, history, and role in society.
- **Oral traditions:** Spoken accounts passed down through generations to preserve myths, histories, and cultural practices.
- **Proto-language:** A simple system of communication or ancestral language from which later languages evolved.
- **Typological relationship:** A similarity between languages based on shared structural features, even when they do not share ancestry.
- **Writing systems:** Methods of recording language through symbols, such as cuneiform in Mesopotamia or hieroglyphics in Ancient Egypt.



Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. Which theory of language origin suggests that language began as imitations of natural sounds? a. Pooh-pooh theory b. Bow-wow theory c. Ding-dong theory d. Gesture theory (Linked to SLO 2.1)
2. What term refers to simple systems of communication before the development of fully structured languages? a. Proto-language b. Dialect c. Vernacular d. Script (Linked to SLO 2.1)
3. Which of the following is a factor influencing language spread? a. Migration b. Silence c. Isolation d. Forgetfulness (Linked to SLO 2.3)
4. A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues is called a: a. Dialect b. Vernacular c. Lingua franca d. Proto-language (Linked to SLO 2.3)
5. English and German are related through their: a. Romance roots b. Germanic roots c. Indo-Iranian roots d. Niger-Congo roots (Linked to SLO 2.5)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define a language family and give one example. (Linked to SLO 2.5)
7. Explain one way in which colonisation influenced language distribution. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
8. Identify one implication of studying language origins for modern language study. (Linked to SLO 2.7)
9. State one difference between genetic and typological relationships among languages. (Linked to SLO 2.5)
10. Give one example of linguistic diversity in Africa. (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the factors that influence the distribution of languages across the world, providing examples. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
12. Evaluate the cultural and historical significance of language families, using examples to support your points. (Linked to SLO 2.5)
13. Assess the implications of language origins, distribution, and relationships for modern language study. (Linked to SLO 2.7)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. b. Bow-wow theory
2. a. Proto-language
3. a. Migration
4. c. Lingua franca



5. b. Germanic roots

Short-Answer Questions

6. A language family is a group of languages that share a common ancestral origin. Example: Indo-European family.
7. Colonisation spread European languages such as Spanish and Portuguese to South America, replacing or marginalising indigenous languages.
8. Studying language origins helps linguists preserve endangered languages and design effective teaching methods.
9. Genetic relationships are based on shared ancestry, while typological relationships are based on structural similarities without ancestry.
10. Africa has thousands of languages, including Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, reflecting its linguistic diversity.

Long-Answer Questions

11. **Basic response:** Factors influencing language distribution include migration, trade, colonisation, and globalisation. For example, English spread globally through colonisation and trade. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may also discuss modern influences such as technology, media, and education, which accelerate the spread of dominant languages while marginalising minority ones.
12. **Basic response:** Language families are significant because they show historical connections. For example, Romance languages like French and Spanish evolved from Latin. **Value-added response:** Learners may extend this by explaining how language families reveal cultural exchanges, migration patterns, and even political histories, such as the spread of Indo-European languages across continents.
13. **Basic response:** Studying origins, distribution, and relationships helps in comparative studies, language preservation, and translation. **Value-added response:** Learners may go further by evaluating how these studies inform artificial intelligence, global communication strategies, and policies for multilingual education.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 2]

Pilot questions 2.1

1. Bow-wow theory
2. Proto-language
3. Cave paintings and symbolic artefacts
4. The invention of writing systems
5. Cuneiform

Pilot questions 2.2

1. Migration
2. Lingua franca



3. Africa
4. Spanish and Portuguese
5. Yoruba

Pilot questions 2.3

1. Language family
2. Spanish and Italian
3. Typological relationships
4. Germanic roots
5. Niger-Congo

Pilot questions 2.4

1. Migration
2. Linguistic diversity
3. Africa
4. Comparative studies
5. Designing effective teaching methods

References and Attributions [Series 2]

This section compiles all references and attributions for *Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages*. It includes suggested open educational resources (OERs) and notes on AI-generated illustration prompts. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) guidelines for clarity and consistency.

General References

- Campbell, L. (2017). *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ethnologue. (2023). *Languages of the World*. SIL International. Retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com>
- UNESCO. (2010). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Illustration Attributions

- *Figure 2.1 Major theories of language origin*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram summarising bow-wow, pooh-pooh, and ding-dong theories of language origin.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “theories of language origin diagram OER”
- *Plate 2.1 Early evidence of human communication*



- AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing cave paintings and symbolic artefacts representing early human communication.”
- Suggested OER search string: “cave paintings language origin OER image”
- *Table 2.1 Examples of early writing systems and their regions*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table listing early writing systems such as cuneiform and hieroglyphics with regions of origin.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “early writing systems cuneiform hieroglyphics OER table”
- *Figure 2.2 Factors influencing the spread of languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing migration, trade, colonisation, and globalisation as factors influencing language spread.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “factors influencing language spread diagram OER”
- *Table 2.2 Examples of regional and global language patterns*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing examples of regional and global language patterns with dominant languages.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “regional and global language distribution OER table”
- *Plate 2.2 Global distribution of selected languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a world map highlighting regions with examples of language distribution such as Nigeria, South America, and Asia.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “world map language distribution OER image”
- *Figure 2.3 Example of a language family tree*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing a tree model of the Indo-European language family with branches like English, French, Hindi, and Russian.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Indo-European language family tree diagram OER”
- *Table 2.3 Examples of genetic and typological relationships*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table comparing genetic relationships and typological relationships with examples of languages.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “genetic vs typological language relationships OER table”
- *Plate 2.3 Global examples of related languages*



- AI-generated prompt: “Generate a world map highlighting regions with examples of related languages such as Indo-European and Niger-Congo families.”
- Suggested OER search string: “world map language families related languages OER image”
- *Figure 2.4 Language distribution as evidence of human migration*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing human migration routes linked to the spread of Indo-European languages.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language distribution human migration diagram OER”
- *Plate 2.4 Linguistic diversity across cultures*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing people from different regions speaking diverse languages to represent linguistic diversity.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “linguistic diversity cultures OER image”
- *Box 2.1 Implications of origins, distribution, and relationships for modern language study*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising implications of language origins, distribution, and relationships for modern language study.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “implications of language study preservation teaching translation OER”

Course code: LIN 105

Course title: Languages of the World

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Exploring Living and Dead Languages of the World

Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages

Series 3: Language Classification, Status, and Functions

Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context

Series 5: Language Families and Universals: Defining Characteristics

Proposed Outline for Series 3

Part .1 Language Classification



- 3.1.1 Genetic classification of languages
- 3.1.2 Typological classification of languages
- 3.1.3 Areal classification and language contact

Part .2 Language Status

- 3.2.1 National and official languages
- 3.2.2 Minority and endangered languages
- 3.2.3 Global languages and lingua francas

Part .3 Language Functions

- 3.3.1 Communicative functions in society
- 3.3.2 Educational and administrative functions
- 3.3.3 Cultural and identity functions

Part .4 Implications of Classification, Status, and Functions

- 3.4.1 Impact on language policy and planning
- 3.4.2 Role in preserving linguistic diversity
- 3.4.3 Relevance for modern global communication

Introduction

Languages are not only systems of communication but also markers of identity, power, and cultural heritage. Around the world, languages are classified into families, assigned different statuses within societies, and serve multiple functions in everyday life. Understanding these aspects helps us appreciate why some languages thrive globally while others remain local or endangered. In the last Series, we explored the origins, distribution, and relationships of languages. Building on that foundation, this Series will focus on how languages are grouped, valued, and used in society.

The aim of this Series is to equip you with the ability to explain how languages are classified, analyse their social and political status, and evaluate the functions they perform in different contexts.

We shall commence this Series by examining language classification, considering genetic, typological, and areal approaches. Next, we will explore language status, focusing on national, official, minority, endangered, and global languages. Following that, we will study language functions, looking at their communicative, educational, administrative, and cultural roles. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the implications of classification, status, and functions, highlighting their impact on language policy, diversity, and global communication.

Series Learning Outcomes



Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 3.1** define genetic classification of languages and identify examples of language families,
- **SLO 3.2** explain typological classification by describing structural similarities among unrelated languages,
- **SLO 3.3** analyse areal classification and evaluate the role of language contact in shaping linguistic features,
- **SLO 3.4** describe the distinctions between national and official languages with relevant examples,
- **SLO 3.5** explain the challenges faced by minority and endangered languages in different regions,
- **SLO 3.6** evaluate the role of global languages and lingua francas in international communication,
- **SLO 3.7** illustrate the communicative functions of language in everyday social interaction,
- **SLO 3.8** analyse the educational and administrative functions of language within institutions,
- **SLO 3.9** assess the cultural and identity functions of language in shaping communities, and
- **SLO 3.10** evaluate the implications of language classification, status, and functions for policy, diversity, and global communication.

3.1 Language Classification

3.1.1 Genetic classification of languages

Genetic classification refers to grouping languages based on their common ancestral origin. A **language family** is defined as a set of languages that have evolved from a single earlier language, known as a **proto-language**. For example, the Indo-European family includes English, French, Hindi, and Russian, all tracing back to Proto-Indo-European. This approach helps linguists trace historical connections and reconstruct language evolution.

Fill in the blank: A set of languages that have evolved from a single ancestral language is called a _____.



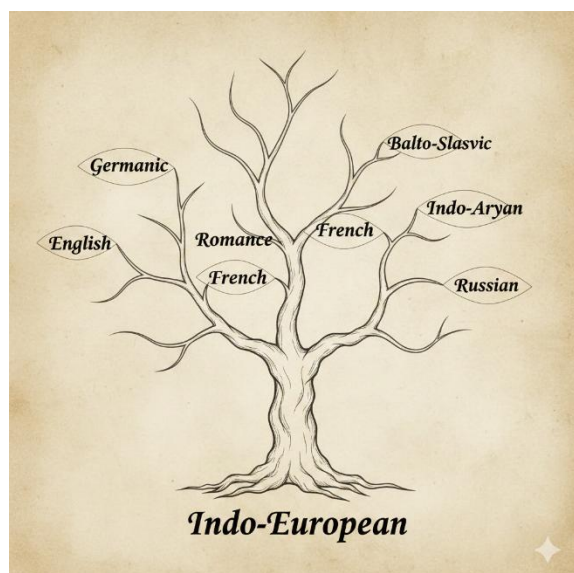


Figure 3.1 Genetic classification of languages (Indo-European family tree)

3.1.2 Typological classification of languages

Typological classification groups languages based on structural similarities rather than ancestry. A **typological relationship** exists when languages share features such as word order, phonology, or morphology, even if they are not genetically related. For instance, Turkish and Japanese are typologically similar because they both use agglutination, but they do not share a common ancestor. This method highlights how languages can converge in structure due to similar communicative needs.

Fill in the blank: When languages share structural similarities without a common ancestor, they are classified _____.

Language Pair	Typology	Structural Characteristic	Examples of Connection
English & Mandarin	Analytic (Isolating)	These languages rely heavily on word order and helper words (particles/prepositions) rather than changing the form of the word itself.	In both, "I love you" depends on the sequence of words to convey the meaning.
Turkish & Japanese	Agglutinative (Synthetic)	These languages "glue" specific, unchanging suffixes to a root word to change its meaning or tense.	A single word in Turkish or Japanese can often represent an entire sentence in English.



Table 3.1 Examples of typological classification

3.1.3 Areal classification and language contact

Areal classification focuses on languages that share features due to geographical proximity and **language contact**, which refers to the influence languages exert on one another when communities interact. For example, languages in the Balkan region (Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Romanian) share grammatical features despite belonging to different families. This is known as a **Sprachbund**, meaning a group of languages with shared traits due to contact rather than ancestry.

Fill in the blank: A group of languages that share traits due to contact rather than ancestry is called a _____.



Plate 3.1 Areal classification: The Balkan Sprachbund

Pilot questions 3.1

1. What term refers to a set of languages that have evolved from a single ancestral language?
a. Dialect group b. Language family c. Typological set d. Sprachbund
2. Which classification groups languages based on structural similarities rather than ancestry?
a. Genetic classification b. Typological classification c. Areal classification d. Historical classification
3. Turkish and Japanese are classified together typologically because they both use: a. Agglutination b. Analytic structures c. Romance roots d. Germanic roots
4. What term refers to a group of languages that share traits due to contact rather than ancestry? a. Proto-language b. Sprachbund c. Dialect cluster d. Genetic family
5. Which region provides a clear example of areal classification through language contact? a. The Balkans b. West Africa c. South America d. Scandinavia

3.2 Language Status

3.2.1 National and official languages



A **national language** is a language that symbolises the identity of a nation and is often used in cultural and political contexts. An **official language**, on the other hand, is a language that has been legally designated for use in government, administration, and education. For example, Swahili is recognised as a national language in Tanzania, while English serves as an official language in Nigeria. The distinction between these two categories highlights how languages can carry both symbolic and functional roles within societies.

Fill in the blank: A language legally designated for use in government and administration is called an _____ language.

Feature	National Language	Official Language
Definition	A language that represents the cultural and national identity of a country and its people.	A language designated by a government for legal and administrative use (courts, laws, schools).
Primary Function	Cultural cohesion and symbolic representation of the heritage.	Practical communication in government and official documentation.
Example: Kenya/Tanzania	Swahili (The language of the people and national unity).	English (Used for high-level government, business, and education).
Example: Paraguay	Guaraní (Spoken by the majority of the population as a cultural staple).	Spanish (Used for official state business).
Example: Singapore	Malay (The ceremonial national language for historical reasons).	English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil (Four distinct official languages for administration).

Table 3.2 Distinction between national and official languages

3.2.2 Minority and endangered languages

Minority languages are languages spoken by smaller groups within a country or region, often without official recognition. **Endangered languages** are those at risk of disappearing because fewer people speak them, and younger generations may not be learning them. For instance, many indigenous languages in South America and Australia are endangered due to the dominance of Spanish, Portuguese, and English. Preserving these languages is vital for maintaining cultural heritage and diversity.



Fill in the blank: Languages at risk of disappearing because fewer people speak them are called _____ languages.



Plate 3.2 Minority and endangered languages in practice

3.2.3 Global languages and lingua francas

Global languages are languages spoken widely across the world, often due to historical, economic, or political influence. Examples include English, Spanish, and Mandarin. A **lingua franca** is a language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues, often in trade or international relations. English today functions as the most prominent lingua franca, enabling communication across diverse regions. The rise of global languages has facilitated international cooperation but also created challenges for linguistic diversity.

Fill in the blank: A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues is called a _____.



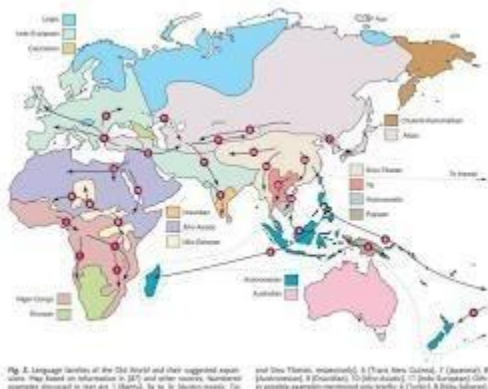


Figure 3.2 Spread of global languages and lingua francas

Pilot questions 3.2

1. What term refers to a language legally designated for use in government and administration? a. National language b. Official language c. Minority language d. Endangered language
2. Languages spoken by smaller groups within a country or region are called: a. National languages b. Official languages c. Minority languages d. Global languages
3. What term refers to languages at risk of disappearing because fewer people speak them? a. Minority languages b. Endangered languages c. Lingua francas d. National languages
4. Which of the following is an example of a global language? a. Yoruba b. English c. Quechua d. Maori
5. A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues is called a: a. Dialect b. Vernacular c. Lingua franca d. Proto-language

3.3 Language Functions

3.3.1 Communicative functions in society

The most fundamental role of language is its **communicative function**, which refers to the ability of language to transmit information, ideas, emotions, and intentions between individuals. Language enables social interaction, supports cooperation, and allows communities to share knowledge. For example, greetings, instructions, and storytelling all demonstrate how language functions as a tool for communication.

Fill in the blank: The ability of language to transmit information, ideas, emotions, and intentions is called its _____ function.





Figure 3.3 Communicative functions of language in society

3.3.2 Educational and administrative functions

Language also serves important roles in **education** and **administration**. In education, language is the medium through which knowledge is transmitted, whether orally or in writing. It allows teachers to explain concepts and learners to express understanding. In administration, language provides the framework for laws, policies, and governance. Official documents, court proceedings, and government communication all rely on language to ensure clarity and order.

Fill in the blank: In education, language serves as the _____ through which knowledge is transmitted.

Domain	Examples of Language Use	Primary Function
Education	Classroom teaching, textbooks, standardized testing, academic research, and peer discussions.	Pedagogical: Facilitates knowledge transfer, cognitive development, and literacy.
Administration	Legislative drafting (laws), court proceedings, government policies, tax forms, and official gazettes.	Regulative: Establishes legal authority, ensures civil order, and manages state operations.
Governance	Diplomatic relations, public health announcements, immigration services, and voting materials.	Civic: Ensures transparency and allows citizens to interact with the state.

Table 3.3 Educational and administrative functions of language

3.3.3 Cultural and identity functions

Language is closely tied to **culture**, which refers to the shared practices, values, and traditions of a community, and **identity**, which is the sense of belonging to a group. Through songs, proverbs,



rituals, and literature, language preserves cultural heritage and strengthens group identity. For example, indigenous languages often carry unique cultural expressions that cannot be fully translated into dominant languages. This highlights the importance of language in maintaining diversity and identity.

Fill in the blank: Language preserves cultural heritage and strengthens group _____.

Plate 3.3 Cultural and identity functions of language

Short description: An image showing people engaging in cultural practices such as storytelling, singing, or rituals in their native language. Sample AI prompt: “Generate an image showing people engaging in cultural practices such as storytelling or singing in their native language.” Search string: “language cultural identity functions OER image”

Pilot questions 3.3

1. What term refers to the ability of language to transmit information, ideas, emotions, and intentions? a. Cultural function b. Communicative function c. Administrative function d. Educational function
2. In education, language serves as the _____ through which knowledge is transmitted. a. Medium b. Channel c. Tool d. Framework
3. Which of the following is an example of the administrative function of language? a. Singing songs b. Writing laws and policies c. Greeting friends d. Telling stories
4. Language preserves cultural heritage and strengthens group _____. a. Communication b. Identity c. Administration d. Education
5. Which of the following best illustrates the cultural function of language? a. Court proceedings b. Textbook writing c. Storytelling and proverbs d. Official government reports

3.4 Implications of Classification, Status, and Functions

3.4.1 Impact on language policy and planning

The study of language classification, status, and functions has direct implications for **language policy**, which refers to the decisions governments make about language use, and **language planning**, which involves deliberate efforts to develop or promote certain languages. For example, countries with multiple languages must decide which ones to use in education, administration, and media. These decisions affect national unity, cultural preservation, and access to opportunities.

Fill in the blank: The deliberate effort to develop or promote certain languages is referred to as language _____.



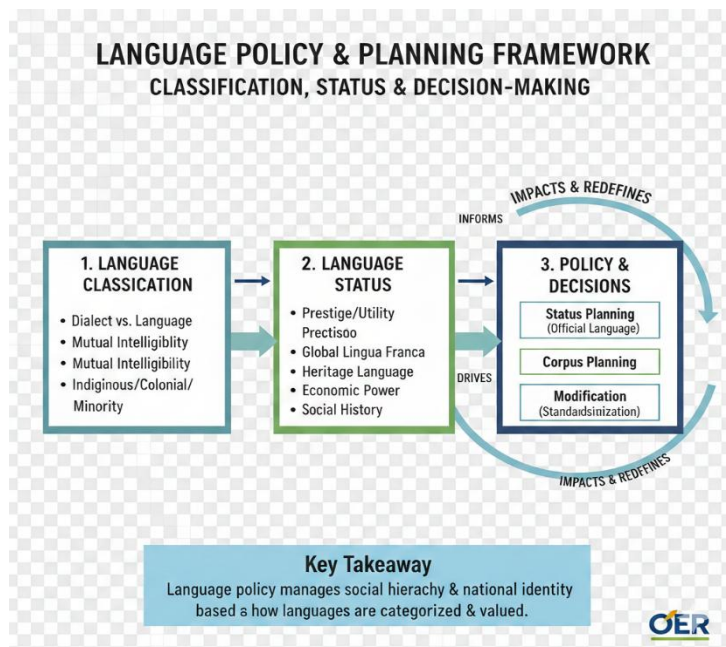


Figure 3.4 Language classification and its impact on policy and planning

3.4.2 Role in preserving linguistic diversity

Language classification and status also play a role in preserving **linguistic diversity**, which refers to the variety of languages spoken across the world. Recognising minority and endangered languages encourages efforts to document and revitalise them. For instance, policies that support bilingual education or promote indigenous languages help maintain cultural heritage. Without such efforts, many languages risk extinction, leading to the loss of unique worldviews and traditions.

Fill in the blank: The variety of languages spoken across the world is referred to as _____ diversity.





Plate 3.4 Preserving linguistic diversity through recognition and revitalisation

3.4.3 Relevance for modern global communication

Finally, the implications of classification, status, and functions extend to **global communication**, which refers to the exchange of information across international boundaries. Global languages such as English and Mandarin facilitate international trade, diplomacy, and education. However, their dominance can marginalise smaller languages. Understanding classification and status helps balance the need for global communication with the preservation of local identities. This ensures that communication is inclusive and culturally sensitive.

Fill in the blank: Languages such as English and Mandarin that facilitate international trade and diplomacy are examples of _____ languages.

Factor	Primary Impact	Global Consequence
Classification	Identity & Legitimacy	Determines which groups receive legal protection and educational resources.
Status	Power Dynamics	Creates a hierarchy where certain "prestige" languages dominate media and technology.
Functions	Economic Access	Dictates the "market value" of a language in employment and international business.

Box 3.1 Implications of classification, status, and functions for global communication

Pilot questions 3.4



1. The deliberate effort to develop or promote certain languages is referred to as: a. Language planning b. Language diversity c. Language contact d. Language identity
2. The variety of languages spoken across the world is referred to as: a. Language heritage b. Linguistic diversity c. Language shift d. Language policy
3. Which of the following is an example of a policy that helps preserve linguistic diversity? a. Promoting bilingual education b. Restricting minority languages c. Eliminating indigenous languages d. Using only global languages
4. Languages such as English and Mandarin that facilitate international trade and diplomacy are examples of: a. Minority languages b. Endangered languages c. Global languages d. National languages
5. Why is it important to balance global communication with the preservation of local identities? a. To ensure inclusive and culturally sensitive communication b. To eliminate linguistic diversity c. To promote only dominant languages d. To reduce international cooperation

Series Summary

This Series has focused on how languages are classified, the status they hold within societies, and the functions they perform. Its purpose has been to show how these aspects shape communication, identity, and policy, while also influencing global interaction and cultural preservation. We began by examining language classification, looking at genetic, typological, and areal approaches. Then we explored language status, distinguishing between national, official, minority, endangered, and global languages. Following that, we studied language functions, considering their communicative, educational, administrative, cultural, and identity roles. Finally, we assessed the implications of classification, status, and functions, highlighting their impact on language policy, diversity, and global communication.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to define and explain different approaches to language classification, analyse the social and political status of languages, illustrate their functions in society, and evaluate their broader implications for policy and global communication. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you are equipped to apply these insights in understanding how languages connect communities, preserve diversity, and support effective communication across local and international contexts.

Glossary of Terms

- **Areal classification:** A way of grouping languages based on shared features that arise from geographical proximity and contact, rather than ancestry.
- **Communicative function:** The role of language in transmitting information, ideas, emotions, and intentions between individuals.
- **Cultural function:** The role of language in preserving traditions, values, and practices within a community.
- **Endangered language:** A language at risk of disappearing because fewer people speak it and younger generations may not be learning it.



- **Genetic classification:** Grouping languages according to their common ancestral origin, such as the Indo-European family.
- **Global language:** A language spoken widely across the world, often used in international trade, diplomacy, and education.
- **Identity function:** The role of language in strengthening a sense of belonging to a particular group or community.
- **Language family:** A set of languages that have evolved from a single ancestral language, known as a proto-language.
- **Language planning:** The deliberate effort to develop, promote, or regulate the use of certain languages within a society.
- **Language policy:** Government decisions about which languages are used in education, administration, and public life.
- **Lingua franca:** A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues, often in trade or international relations.
- **Linguistic diversity:** The variety of languages spoken across the world, reflecting cultural richness and human experience.
- **Minority language:** A language spoken by a smaller group within a country or region, often without official recognition.
- **National language:** A language that symbolises the identity of a nation and is often used in cultural and political contexts.
- **Official language:** A language legally designated for use in government, administration, and education.
- **Proto-language:** An ancestral language from which later languages evolved.
- **Sprachbund:** A group of languages that share traits due to contact and geographical proximity, rather than common ancestry.
- **Typological classification:** Grouping languages based on structural similarities, such as word order or morphology, regardless of ancestry.

Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. Which classification groups languages according to their common ancestral origin? a. Genetic classification b. Typological classification c. Areal classification d. Functional classification (Linked to SLO 3.1)
2. Turkish and Japanese are classified together typologically because they both use: a. Agglutination b. Analytic structures c. Romance roots d. Germanic roots (Linked to SLO 3.2)
3. A group of languages that share traits due to contact rather than ancestry is called a: a. Proto-language b. Sprachbund c. Dialect cluster d. Genetic family (Linked to SLO 3.3)
4. Which of the following is a language legally designated for use in government and administration? a. National language b. Official language c. Minority language d. Endangered language (Linked to SLO 3.4)



5. Languages such as English and Mandarin that facilitate international trade and diplomacy are examples of: a. Minority languages b. Endangered languages c. Global languages d. National languages (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define a language family and give one example. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
7. Explain one difference between genetic and typological classification. (Linked to SLO 3.2)
8. What is meant by the term “minority language”? Provide one example. (Linked to SLO 3.5)
9. State one communicative function of language in society. (Linked to SLO 3.7)
10. Identify one implication of language classification for policy and planning. (Linked to SLO 3.10)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the role of language status in shaping national identity, using examples of national and official languages. (Linked to SLO 3.4)
12. Evaluate the importance of preserving linguistic diversity, with reference to minority and endangered languages. (Linked to SLO 3.5, SLO 3.9)
13. Assess the implications of global languages and lingua francas for modern communication and cultural identity. (Linked to SLO 3.6, SLO 3.10)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. a. Genetic classification
2. a. Agglutination
3. b. Sprachbund
4. b. Official language
5. c. Global languages

Short-Answer Questions

6. A language family is a set of languages that have evolved from a single ancestral language. Example: Indo-European family.
7. Genetic classification is based on shared ancestry, while typological classification is based on structural similarities without ancestry.
8. A minority language is spoken by a smaller group within a country or region, often without official recognition. Example: Basque in Spain.
9. One communicative function of language is transmitting information between individuals.
10. Language classification can inform policy decisions, such as which languages to use in education or administration.

Long-Answer Questions



11. **Basic response:** National languages symbolise identity, while official languages are used in governance. For example, Swahili is a national language in Tanzania, while English is an official language in Nigeria. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may also discuss how language status influences unity, cultural pride, and political legitimacy, as well as tensions that arise when minority languages are excluded.
12. **Basic response:** Preserving linguistic diversity ensures that minority and endangered languages continue to exist, maintaining cultural heritage. **Value-added response:** Learners may extend this by evaluating revitalisation strategies such as bilingual education, documentation projects, and community initiatives, and by discussing the global consequences of language extinction.
13. **Basic response:** Global languages and lingua francas facilitate communication across nations, supporting trade and diplomacy. **Value-added response:** Learners may go further by assessing how global languages can marginalise smaller languages, influence cultural identity, and create challenges for inclusive communication in multilingual societies.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 3]

Pilot questions 3.1

1. Language family
2. Typological classification
3. Agglutination
4. Sprachbund
5. The Balkans

Pilot questions 3.2

1. Official language
2. Minority languages
3. Endangered languages
4. English
5. Lingua franca

Pilot questions 3.3

1. Communicative function
2. Medium
3. Writing laws and policies
4. Identity
5. Storytelling and proverbs

Pilot questions 3.4

1. Language planning
2. Linguistic diversity
3. Promoting bilingual education



4. Global languages
5. To ensure inclusive and culturally sensitive communication

References and Attributions [Series 3]

This section compiles all references and attributions for *Series 3: Classification, Status, and Functions of Languages*. It includes suggested open educational resources (OERs) and notes on AI-generated illustration prompts. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) guidelines for clarity and consistency.

General References

- Campbell, L. (2017). *Historical linguistics: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ethnologue. (2023). *Languages of the world*. SIL International. Retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com>
- UNESCO. (2010). *Atlas of the world's languages in danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Illustration Attributions

- *Figure 3.1 Genetic classification of languages (Indo-European family tree)*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing a tree model of the Indo-European language family with branches like English, French, Hindi, and Russian.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Indo-European language family tree diagram OER”
- *Table 3.1 Examples of typological classification*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table comparing typological classification examples such as Turkish–Japanese and English–Mandarin.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “typological classification of languages examples OER table”
- *Plate 3.1 Areal classification: The Balkan Sprachbund*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a map highlighting Balkan languages (Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian) showing shared features due to contact.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Balkan Sprachbund map OER image”
- *Table 3.2 Distinction between national and official languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table comparing national and official languages with definitions and examples such as Swahili and English.”



- Suggested OER search string: “national vs official languages examples OER table”
- *Plate 3.2 Minority and endangered languages in practice*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing indigenous communities using minority and endangered languages in South America or Australia.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “indigenous endangered languages OER image”
- *Figure 3.2 Spread of global languages and lingua francas*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing the spread of global languages such as English, Spanish, and Mandarin across continents.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “global languages lingua franca diagram OER”
- *Figure 3.3 Communicative functions of language in society*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing communication flow between speakers and listeners, highlighting information, emotions, and ideas.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language communicative function diagram OER”
- *Table 3.3 Educational and administrative functions of language*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table listing examples of language use in education and administration, such as teaching and laws.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language functions education administration OER table”
- *Plate 3.3 Cultural and identity functions of language*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing people engaging in cultural practices such as storytelling or singing in their native language.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language cultural identity functions OER image”
- *Figure 3.4 Language classification and its impact on policy and planning*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing how language classification and status influence language policy and planning decisions.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language policy and planning diagram OER”
- *Plate 3.4 Preserving linguistic diversity through recognition and revitalisation*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing diverse communities speaking different languages to represent linguistic diversity.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “linguistic diversity preservation OER image”
- *Box 3.1 Implications of classification, status, and functions for global communication*



- AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising implications of language classification, status, and functions for global communication.”
- Suggested OER search string: “language classification status functions global communication OER”

Course code: LIN 105

Course title: Languages of the World

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Exploring Living and Dead Languages of the World

Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages

Series 3: Language Classification, Status, and Functions

Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context

Series 5: Language Families and Universals: Defining Characteristics

Proposed Outline for Series 4

Part .1 Nigerian languages in national and regional contexts

- 4.1.1 Major Nigerian languages and their distribution
- 4.1.2 Roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture
- 4.1.3 Challenges facing Nigerian languages (e.g., dominance of English, urbanisation, language shift)

Part .2 African languages in continental perspective

- 4.2.1 Major African language families (Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan)
- 4.2.2 Functions of African languages in regional integration and identity
- 4.2.3 Issues of multilingualism and language policy in Africa

Part .3 African languages in global context

- 4.3.1 African languages in diaspora communities
- 4.3.2 Contributions of African languages to global culture (music, literature, media)
- 4.3.3 African languages and technology in the digital age

Part .4 Implications for preservation and global communication



- **4.4.1 Strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages**
- **4.4.2 Balancing global languages with local identities**
- **4.4.3 Future prospects for African languages in international discourse**

Introduction

Languages in Nigeria and across Africa are more than tools of communication; they are carriers of identity, culture, and history. With hundreds of languages spoken in Nigeria alone and thousands across the continent, these languages play vital roles in education, governance, and everyday life. Yet, they also face challenges from globalisation, the dominance of international languages, and rapid social change. In the last Series, we examined how languages are classified, their status, and the functions they perform. Building on that foundation, this Series will focus on Nigerian and African languages, situating them within both regional and global contexts.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to describe the distribution and roles of Nigerian and African languages, analyse their challenges, and evaluate their contributions to global culture and communication.

We shall commence this Series by exploring Nigerian languages in national and regional contexts, looking at their distribution, roles, and challenges. Next, we will move on to African languages in continental perspective, considering major language families, multilingualism, and policy issues. Following that, we will examine African languages in global context, focusing on diaspora communities, cultural contributions, and technology. Finally, we will conclude by assessing implications for preservation and global communication, highlighting strategies to balance local identities with global interaction.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 4.1** describe the major Nigerian languages and explain their geographical distribution,
- **SLO 4.2** analyse the roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and cultural life,
- **SLO 4.3** evaluate the challenges facing Nigerian languages, including language shift and the dominance of English,
- **SLO 4.4** identify the major African language families and provide examples of languages within each,
- **SLO 4.5** explain the functions of African languages in regional integration and identity formation,
- **SLO 4.6** analyse issues of multilingualism and language policy across Africa,
- **SLO 4.7** describe the presence of African languages in diaspora communities,
- **SLO 4.8** evaluate the contributions of African languages to global culture through music, literature, and media,
- **SLO 4.9** assess the role of African languages in technology and the digital age,



- **SLO 4.10** propose strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages in the face of globalisation,
- **SLO 4.11** evaluate how to balance global languages with local identities in communication, and
- **SLO 4.12** assess the future prospects of African languages in international discourse.

4.1 Nigerian Languages in National and Regional Contexts

4.1.1 Major Nigerian languages and their distribution

Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Africa, with over 500 languages spoken across its regions. Among these, three are considered **major Nigerian languages** due to their wide distribution and influence: **Hausa**, **Yoruba**, and **Igbo**. Hausa is predominantly spoken in the northern region, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast. These languages serve as regional lingua francas, enabling communication across ethnic boundaries.

Fill in the blank: The three major Nigerian languages are Hausa, _____, and Igbo.

**MAJOR LANGUAGE DISTRIBUTION:
HAUSA, YORUBA IGBO**

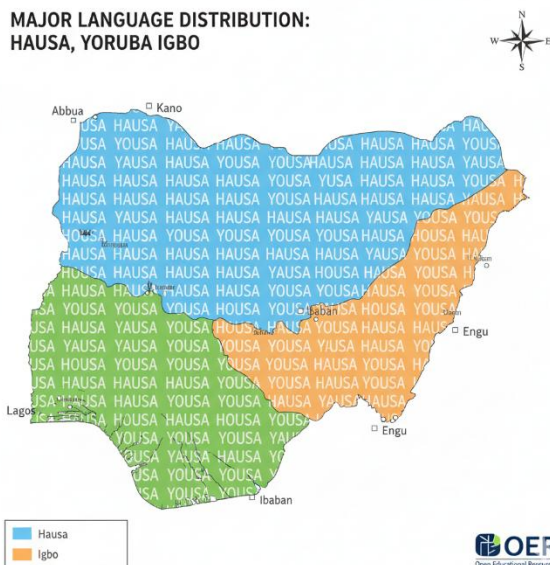


Plate 4.1 Distribution of major Nigerian languages

4.1.2 Roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture

Nigerian languages play important roles in **education**, **administration**, and **culture**. In education, they are used as mediums of instruction at the primary level, helping children learn in their mother tongue before transitioning to English. In administration, local languages are often used in community governance and public communication. Culturally, Nigerian languages are central to oral traditions, literature, music, and festivals, preserving identity and heritage.



Fill in the blank: At the primary level, Nigerian children are often taught in their _____ before transitioning to English.

Sector	Primary Functions	Specific Examples
Education	Medium of Instruction (Early years) and as a Subject (Primary/Secondary).	The National Policy on Education mandates teaching in the "mother tongue" or "language of the immediate community" for the first three years of primary school.
Governance	Legislative Debate and Public Sensitization.	The 1999 Constitution allows for the use of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in the National Assembly (when arrangements are made), and state houses use them for grassroots outreach.
Culture	Ritual, Performance, and Traditional Law.	Languages are used in the installation of traditional rulers (e.g., the Oba of Lagos or Sultan of Sokoto) and in major festivals like the New Yam Festival.
Media	Broadcasting and Entertainment.	Regional news broadcasts on NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) and the massive "Nollywood" industries in Yoruba and Hausa (Kannywood).

Table 4.1 Roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture

4.1.3 Challenges facing Nigerian languages

Despite their importance, Nigerian languages face several **challenges**. The dominance of English as the official language often overshadows indigenous languages in education and administration. **Language shift**, which occurs when communities gradually abandon their native language for another, is common in urban areas. Additionally, globalisation and urbanisation contribute to declining use of minority languages, putting them at risk of endangerment.

Fill in the blank: When communities gradually abandon their native language for another, this process is called language _____.





Figure 4.1 Challenges facing Nigerian languages

Pilot questions 4.1

1. Which three languages are considered the major Nigerian languages? a. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo b. Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv c. Yoruba, Fulfulde, Igbo d. Hausa, Efik, Yoruba
2. At the primary level, Nigerian children are often taught in their: a. Official language b. Mother tongue c. National language d. Lingua franca
3. Which of the following is a cultural role of Nigerian languages? a. Drafting government policies b. Preserving oral traditions and festivals c. Translating English textbooks d. Writing official laws
4. What term refers to the gradual abandonment of a native language for another? a. Language contact b. Language shift c. Language planning d. Language diversity
5. Which factor most contributes to the declining use of minority Nigerian languages? a. Urbanisation and globalisation b. Increased literacy rates c. National pride d. Agricultural development

4.2 African Languages in Continental Perspective

4.2.1 Major African language families

Africa is home to thousands of languages, which are grouped into **language families**, meaning sets of languages that share a common ancestral origin. The four major families are **Afro-Asiatic**, spoken in North Africa and parts of the Horn of Africa; **Niger-Congo**, the largest family covering



much of Sub-Saharan Africa; **Nilo-Saharan**, found mainly in East and Central Africa; and **Khoisan**, spoken by smaller communities in southern Africa and known for its distinctive click sounds. These families reflect the continent's rich linguistic diversity and historical depth.

Fill in the blank: The African language family known for its distinctive click sounds is the _____ family.

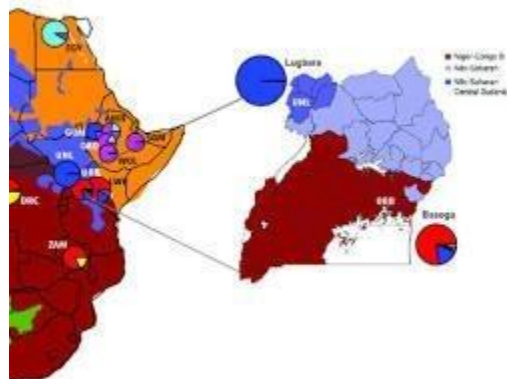


Figure 4.2 Distribution of major African language families

4.2.2 Functions of African languages in regional integration and identity

African languages serve important **functions** in promoting **regional integration**, which refers to cooperation among neighbouring countries, and in strengthening **identity**, which is the sense of belonging to a cultural or ethnic group. For example, Kiswahili is widely spoken across East Africa and functions as a lingua franca, facilitating trade and communication between countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Similarly, Amharic in Ethiopia and Arabic in North Africa reinforce cultural identity and national unity.

Fill in the blank: Kiswahili serves as a _____ across East Africa, enabling communication between different ethnic groups.

Language	Primary Role	Geographic Reach	Strategic Use
Kiswahili	Regional Integration	East & Central Africa (AU official language)	Used as a neutral link language for trade in the EAC and SADC regions.
Amharic	National Identity	Ethiopia	A symbol of historical independence and national unity; the working language of the state.



Language	Primary Role	Geographic Reach	Strategic Use
Arabic	Identity & Integration	North Africa & Horn of Africa	Serves as both a religious identity marker and a major tool for trans-Saharan diplomacy.
Wolof	Local Integration	Senegal / Gambia	Functions as an urban lingua franca that transcends ethnic boundaries in West Africa.
Hausa	Trade Integration	West & Central Africa	Traditionally the language of commerce across the Sahel, linking Nigeria, Niger, and beyond.

Table 4.2 Functions of African languages in integration and identity

4.2.3 Issues of multilingualism and language policy in Africa

Africa is characterised by **multilingualism**, which means the coexistence of multiple languages within a community or country. While this enriches cultural diversity, it also presents challenges for **language policy**, defined as government decisions about which languages to use in education, administration, and public life. For instance, many African countries adopt colonial languages such as English, French, or Portuguese as official languages, while indigenous languages remain dominant in everyday communication. Balancing these choices is crucial for inclusivity and development.

Fill in the blank: The coexistence of multiple languages within a community or country is referred to as _____.

Challenge Area	Core Conflict	Policy Consequence
Linguistic Human Rights	National unity vs. ethnic diversity	Minority languages are often ignored in favor of a "single national identity."
Economic Development	Local relevance vs. global access	Students may lack deep comprehension in local languages OR lack global mobility in English.
Logistics	Idealism vs. practicality	Policies are often written (de jure) but never fully funded or implemented (de facto).

Box 4.1 Challenges of multilingualism and language policy in Africa

Pilot questions 4.2



1. Which African language family is known for its distinctive click sounds? a. Afro-Asiatic b. Niger-Congo c. Nilo-Saharan d. Khoisan
2. Kiswahili serves as a _____ across East Africa. a. National language b. Lingua franca c. Official language d. Minority language
3. Which of the following is an example of a language that reinforces cultural identity in Africa? a. Portuguese b. Amharic c. English d. French
4. The coexistence of multiple languages within a community or country is referred to as: a. Language shift b. Multilingualism c. Language planning d. Language diversity
5. Why do many African countries adopt colonial languages as official languages? a. To preserve indigenous traditions b. To facilitate governance and international relations c. To reduce linguistic diversity d. To promote only minority languages

4.3 African Languages in Global Context

4.3.1 African languages in diaspora communities

African languages have travelled beyond the continent through migration, trade, and historical movements such as the transatlantic slave trade. In **diaspora communities**, meaning groups of people living outside their ancestral homeland, languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa are maintained through cultural practices, religious gatherings, and community networks. These languages help preserve identity and heritage among Africans abroad, even when dominant global languages like English, French, or Portuguese are widely used.

Fill in the blank: Groups of people living outside their ancestral homeland are referred to as _____ communities.



Plate 4.3 African languages in diaspora communities

4.3.2 Contributions of African languages to global culture

African languages contribute significantly to **global culture**, which refers to shared practices and expressions that transcend national boundaries. Through music, literature, film, and oral traditions, African languages have influenced global art and entertainment. For example, Afrobeat music



often incorporates Yoruba and Pidgin English, while African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o use indigenous languages to shape world literature. These contributions highlight the global relevance of African languages beyond their local contexts.

Fill in the blank: Afrobeat music often incorporates _____ and Pidgin English, showcasing African languages in global culture.

Domain	Contribution	Key Outcome
Orality	Passing down history and moral codes through spoken word and song.	Preserves African "vision of the world" against cultural neocolonialism.
Identity	Using language as a "carrier of culture" in digital spaces.	Boosts the global visibility of African brands and influencers.
Authenticity	Refusing to translate lyrics or dialogue for "global appeal."	Increases the "allure" and market value of African creative exports.

Box 4.2 Contributions of African languages to global culture

4.3.3 African languages and technology in the digital age

In the **digital age**, defined as the current era characterised by widespread use of digital technology, African languages are increasingly represented online and in technological platforms. Social media, translation tools, and mobile applications now support languages such as Swahili, Yoruba, and Zulu. This digital presence helps promote inclusivity and ensures that African languages remain relevant in global communication. However, many languages are still underrepresented, creating a need for more investment in localisation and digital resources.

Fill in the blank: The current era characterised by widespread use of digital technology is referred to as the _____ age.



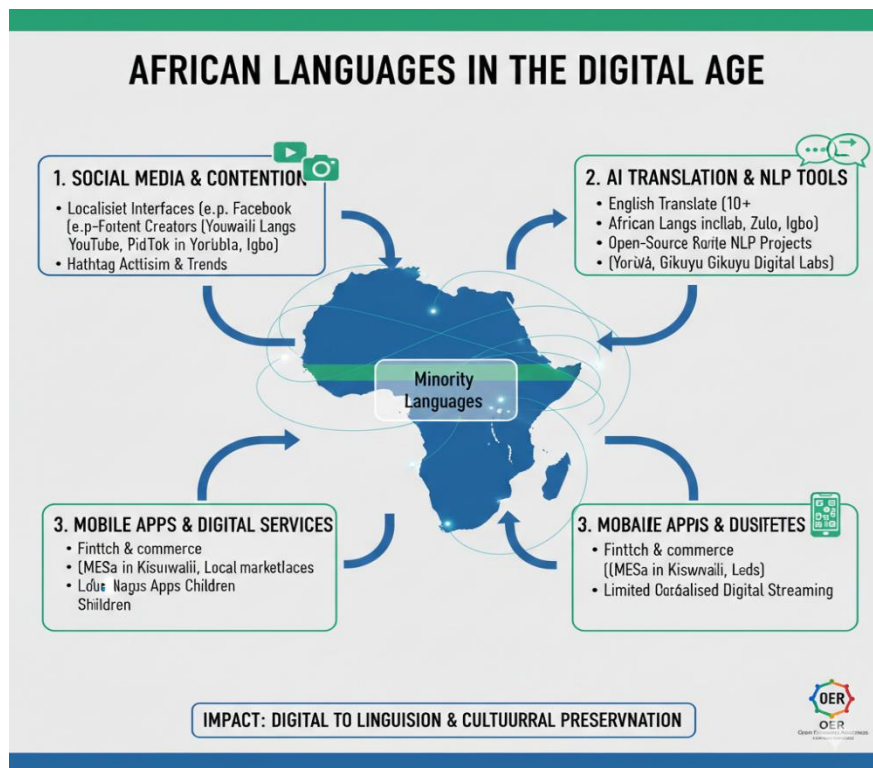


Figure 4.3 African languages in the digital age

Pilot questions 4.3

1. Groups of people living outside their ancestral homeland are referred to as: a. Diaspora communities b. Minority groups c. National communities d. Regional clusters
2. Afrobeat music often incorporates _____ and Pidgin English. a. Hausa b. Yoruba c. Igbo d. Zulu
3. Which of the following is an example of African languages contributing to global literature? a. Chinua Achebe writing in Igbo b. Shakespeare writing in English c. Tolstoy writing in Russian d. Homer writing in Greek
4. The current era characterised by widespread use of digital technology is referred to as the: a. Industrial age b. Digital age c. Colonial age d. Bronze age
5. Why is digital representation important for African languages? a. It ensures inclusivity and global relevance b. It reduces linguistic diversity c. It eliminates indigenous traditions d. It promotes only colonial languages

4.4 Implications for Preservation and Global Communication

4.4.1 Strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages

Preserving Nigerian and African languages requires deliberate efforts to ensure they remain vibrant and relevant. **Language preservation** refers to activities aimed at maintaining and



revitalising languages at risk of decline. Strategies include documenting endangered languages, promoting bilingual education, encouraging the use of indigenous languages in media, and supporting community-driven initiatives. These approaches help safeguard cultural heritage and ensure that future generations can access their linguistic identity.

Fill in the blank: Activities aimed at maintaining and revitalising languages at risk of decline are called language _____.

Strategy	Main Hurdle
Education	High cost of printing textbooks in 500+ languages.
Digital	Lack of internet infrastructure in rural "linguistic hotspots."
Media	Competitive pressure from Western-style pop culture.

Box 4.3 Strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages

4.4.2 Balancing global languages with local identities

The dominance of **global languages**, such as English and French, often creates tension with local identities. While global languages facilitate international communication, they can overshadow indigenous languages. Balancing these requires policies that promote multilingualism, ensuring that local languages are valued alongside global ones. For example, using English for international trade while maintaining Yoruba or Hausa in cultural and educational contexts allows both global relevance and local identity to thrive.

Fill in the blank: Promoting the use of both global and local languages in society is an example of _____.

Domain	Role of Global Language (e.g., English)	Role of Local Identity (e.g., Indigenous Langs)	Balanced Outcome
Education	Used for STEM subjects, international research, and global academic exchange.	Used as the medium of instruction for early literacy and teaching local history.	Additive Bilingualism: Students become proficient in a world language without losing their mother tongue.
Trade & Commerce	Facilitates international contracts, digital	Essential for "last-mile" retail, local market negotiations,	Economic Inclusivity: Formal sectors remain globally competitive



Domain	Role of Global Language (e.g., English)	Role of Local Identity (e.g., Indigenous Langs)	Balanced Outcome
	banking, and trans-continental exports.	and building community trust.	while informal local markets thrive.
Digital Media	Provides access to global platforms (Google, X, LinkedIn) and software coding.	Used in localized UI/UX, regional hashtags, and culturally specific content creation.	Digital Presence: African identities are "digitized," ensuring cultural visibility in the global "village."
Governance	Serves as the official language of law, diplomacy, and inter-ethnic bureaucracy.	Used for grassroots mobilization, public health campaigns, and community town halls.	Participatory Democracy: High-level policy is translated into actionable local understanding.

Table 4.4 Balancing global languages with local identities

4.4.3 Future prospects for African languages in international discourse

The future of African languages in **international discourse**, meaning participation in global conversations, depends on how they adapt to modern challenges. With increasing digital representation, African languages have opportunities to expand their influence in technology, media, and education. However, without strong preservation efforts, many may decline. The prospects are promising if governments, communities, and international organisations invest in language development and promote inclusivity in global platforms.

Fill in the blank: Participation of African languages in global conversations is referred to as international _____.



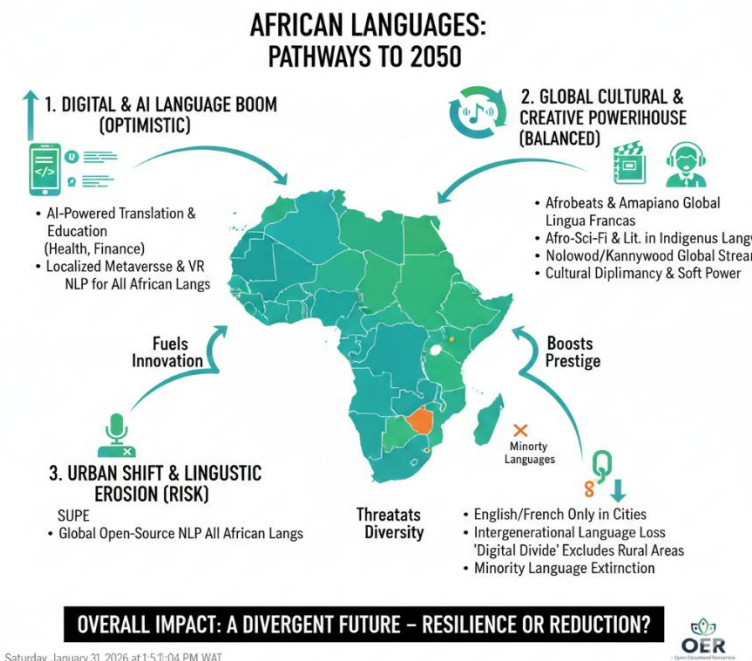


Figure 4.4 Future prospects for African languages in international discourse

Pilot questions 4.4

- Activities aimed at maintaining and revitalising languages at risk of decline are called: a. Language preservation b. Language planning c. Language shift d. Language diversity
- Promoting the use of both global and local languages in society is an example of: a. Monolingualism b. Multilingualism c. Language extinction d. Language dominance
- Which of the following is a strategy for preserving Nigerian and African languages? a. Encouraging bilingual education b. Eliminating indigenous languages c. Promoting only global languages d. Restricting community initiatives
- Participation of African languages in global conversations is referred to as: a. Language policy b. International discourse c. Language planning d. Globalisation
- What factor will most determine the future prospects of African languages in international discourse? a. Government and community investment in language development b. Decline of digital technology c. Restriction of multilingualism d. Exclusive use of colonial languages

Series Summary

This Series has examined Nigerian and African languages within both regional and global contexts, highlighting their importance for identity, culture, education, and international communication. Its purpose has been to show how these languages function locally and globally, while addressing the challenges they face in an era of globalisation and technological change. We began by exploring Nigerian languages in national and regional contexts, considering their



distribution, roles, and challenges. Then we moved on to African languages in continental perspective, focusing on major language families, their functions in integration and identity, and issues of multilingualism and policy. Following that, we studied African languages in global context, looking at diaspora communities, contributions to global culture, and their presence in the digital age. Finally, we assessed implications for preservation and global communication, highlighting strategies, balancing global and local identities, and future prospects.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to describe the distribution and roles of Nigerian and African languages, analyse their challenges, identify major language families, explain their functions in integration and identity, and evaluate their contributions to global culture and technology. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you are also equipped to propose strategies for preservation, assess the balance between global and local languages, and evaluate the future prospects of African languages in international discourse.

Glossary of Terms

- **Afro-Asiatic:** A major African language family spoken in North Africa and parts of the Horn of Africa.
- **Diaspora communities:** Groups of people living outside their ancestral homeland who often maintain cultural and linguistic ties.
- **Digital age:** The current era characterised by widespread use of digital technology, including social media and mobile applications.
- **Identity:** The sense of belonging to a particular cultural, ethnic, or linguistic group, often reinforced through language.
- **International discourse:** Participation in global conversations and communication across national and cultural boundaries.
- **Khoisan:** A small African language family spoken in southern Africa, known for its distinctive click sounds.
- **Language family:** A set of languages that share a common ancestral origin.
- **Language policy:** Government decisions about which languages are used in education, administration, and public life.
- **Language preservation:** Activities aimed at maintaining and revitalising languages at risk of decline.
- **Language shift:** The gradual abandonment of a native language in favour of another, often more dominant language.
- **Lingua franca:** A language used for communication between speakers of different mother tongues, often in trade or international relations.
- **Multilingualism:** The coexistence of multiple languages within a community or country.
- **Niger-Congo:** The largest African language family, covering much of Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Nilo-Saharan:** An African language family found mainly in East and Central Africa.
- **Regional integration:** Cooperation among neighbouring countries, often facilitated by shared or widely spoken languages.
- **Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo:** The three major Nigerian languages, each dominant in different regions of the country.



Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions

1. Which three languages are considered the major Nigerian languages? a. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo b. Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv c. Yoruba, Fulfulde, Igbo d. Hausa, Efik, Yoruba (Linked to SLO 4.1)
2. Which African language family is known for its distinctive click sounds? a. Afro-Asiatic b. Niger-Congo c. Nilo-Saharan d. Khoisan (Linked to SLO 4.4)
3. Kiswahili serves as a _____ across East Africa. a. National language b. Lingua franca c. Official language d. Minority language (Linked to SLO 4.5)
4. The current era characterised by widespread use of digital technology is referred to as the: a. Industrial age b. Digital age c. Colonial age d. Bronze age (Linked to SLO 4.9)
5. Activities aimed at maintaining and revitalising languages at risk of decline are called: a. Language preservation b. Language planning c. Language shift d. Language diversity (Linked to SLO 4.10)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Define language shift and give one example from Nigeria. (Linked to SLO 4.3)
7. Identify one function of African languages in regional integration. (Linked to SLO 4.5)
8. Explain why multilingualism presents challenges for language policy in Africa. (Linked to SLO 4.6)
9. State one way African languages contribute to global culture. (Linked to SLO 4.8)
10. Suggest one strategy for balancing global languages with local identities. (Linked to SLO 4.11)

Long-Answer Questions

11. Analyse the roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture, using examples. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
12. Evaluate the importance of preserving African languages in the face of globalisation. (Linked to SLO 4.10)
13. Assess the future prospects of African languages in international discourse, considering both opportunities and challenges. (Linked to SLO 4.12)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions

1. a. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo
2. d. Khoisan
3. b. Lingua franca
4. b. Digital age
5. a. Language preservation



Short-Answer Questions

6. Language shift is the gradual abandonment of a native language for another. Example: Urban Nigerian families shifting from Igbo to English.
7. Kiswahili facilitates trade and communication across East African countries.
8. Multilingualism makes it difficult to decide which languages should be used in education and governance.
9. African languages contribute through music, literature, and film, such as Afrobeat using Yoruba.
10. Promoting bilingual education where English is taught alongside indigenous languages.

Long-Answer Questions

11. **Basic response:** Nigerian languages are used in primary education, local governance, and cultural practices such as festivals and oral traditions. **Value-added response:** Outstanding learners may also discuss how these roles strengthen identity, promote inclusivity, and highlight tensions with English dominance in administration.
12. **Basic response:** Preserving African languages ensures cultural heritage is maintained and prevents extinction of minority languages. **Value-added response:** Learners may extend this by evaluating revitalisation strategies such as documentation projects, digital tools, and community initiatives, while considering the impact of globalisation.
13. **Basic response:** African languages have opportunities in technology, media, and education but face risks of decline without preservation. **Value-added response:** Learners may go further by assessing how investment in localisation, policy support, and international recognition can enhance their role in global discourse.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 4]

Pilot questions 4.1

1. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo
2. Mother tongue
3. Preserving oral traditions and festivals
4. Language shift
5. Urbanisation and globalisation

Pilot questions 4.2

1. Khoisan
2. Lingua franca
3. Amharic
4. Multilingualism
5. To facilitate governance and international relations

Pilot questions 4.3



1. Diaspora communities
2. Yoruba
3. Chinua Achebe writing in Igbo
4. Digital age
5. It ensures inclusivity and global relevance

Pilot questions 4.4

1. Language preservation
2. Multilingualism
3. Encouraging bilingual education
4. International discourse
5. Government and community investment in language development

References and Attributions [Series 4]

This section compiles all references and attributions for *Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context*. It includes suggested open educational resources (OERs) and notes on AI-generated illustration prompts. The referencing style used here follows APA (7th edition) guidelines for clarity and consistency.

General References

- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Language and the nation: The language question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (1990). *Multilingualism, minority languages, and language policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Central Books.
- Ethnologue. (2023). *Languages of the world*. SIL International. Retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com>
- UNESCO. (2010). *Atlas of the world's languages in danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

Illustration Attributions

- *Plate 4.1 Distribution of major Nigerian languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a map of Nigeria highlighting Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “map of Nigeria language distribution Hausa Yoruba Igbo OER”
- *Table 4.1 Roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing roles of Nigerian languages in education, administration, and culture with examples.”



- Suggested OER search string: “roles of Nigerian languages education administration culture OER table”
- *Figure 4.1 Challenges facing Nigerian languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing challenges facing Nigerian languages including English dominance, urbanisation, and language shift.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “challenges facing Nigerian languages diagram OER”
- *Figure 4.2 Distribution of major African language families*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a map of Africa showing the distribution of Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Khoisan language families.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “map of African language families distribution OER”
- *Table 4.2 Functions of African languages in integration and identity*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing examples of African languages used for regional integration and identity.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “African languages regional integration identity OER table”
- *Box 4.1 Challenges of multilingualism and language policy in Africa*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising challenges of multilingualism and language policy in Africa.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “multilingualism language policy Africa OER summary”
- *Plate 4.3 African languages in diaspora communities*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate an image showing African diaspora communities preserving their languages through cultural practices.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “African diaspora communities language preservation OER image”
- *Box 4.2 Contributions of African languages to global culture*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising contributions of African languages to global culture through music and literature.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “African languages global culture contributions OER summary”
- *Figure 4.3 African languages in the digital age*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing African languages represented in social media, translation tools, and mobile apps.”



- Suggested OER search string: “African languages digital age representation OER diagram”
- *Box 4.3 Strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a text box summarising strategies for preserving Nigerian and African languages.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “language preservation strategies Africa OER summary”
- *Table 4.4 Balancing global languages with local identities*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Create a table showing examples of balancing global languages with local identities in education, trade, and culture.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “balancing global and local languages OER table”
- *Figure 4.4 Future prospects for African languages in international discourse*
 - AI-generated prompt: “Generate a diagram showing future scenarios for African languages including digital growth, cultural influence, and risks of decline.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “future prospects African languages international discourse OER diagram”

Course code: LIN 105

Course title: Languages of the World

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Exploring Living and Dead Languages of the World

Series 2: Origins, Distribution, and Relationships of Languages

Series 3: Language Classification, Status, and Functions

Series 4: Nigerian and African Languages in Global Context

Series 5: Language Families and Universals: Defining Characteristics

Proposed Outline for Series 5

Part .1 Understanding language families

- **5.1.1 Definition of a language family**
- **5.1.2 Major global language families (Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, Afro-Asiatic, etc.)**
- **5.1.3 Methods of identifying and classifying language families**

Part .2 Characteristics of selected language families



- **5.2.1 Indo-European family: distribution and features**
- **5.2.2 Niger-Congo family: distribution and features**
- **5.2.3 Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic families: distribution and features**

Part .3 Linguistic universals

- **5.3.1 Definition of linguistic universals**
- **5.3.2 Types of universals (phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic)**
- **5.3.3 Examples of universals across languages**

Part .4 Implications of language families and universals

- **5.4.1 Relevance for comparative linguistics**
- **5.4.2 Contribution to understanding human cognition and communication**
- **5.4.3 Applications in language teaching and policy**

Introduction

Languages across the world may appear vastly different, yet they often share common roots and features. Understanding how languages are grouped into **families** and how they exhibit **universals** helps us see the bigger picture of human communication. In the last Series, we explored Nigerian and African languages in their regional and global contexts. Building on that foundation, this Series will take us further into the study of language families worldwide and the defining characteristics that unite all human languages.

The aim of this Series is to introduce you to the concept of language families and to equip you with the ability to identify their defining features, while also recognising linguistic universals that cut across all languages.

We shall commence this Series by examining what language families are, including their definitions, major global examples, and methods of classification. Next, we will move on to the characteristics of selected language families, focusing on Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, and Afro-Asiatic. Following that, we will explore linguistic universals, considering phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features that are shared across languages. Finally, we will conclude by discussing the implications of language families and universals for comparative linguistics, human cognition, and practical applications in teaching and policy.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 5.1** define the concept of a language family,



- **SLO 5.2** identify major global language families such as Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, and Afro-Asiatic,
- **SLO 5.3** explain methods used to classify and trace language families,
- **SLO 5.4** describe the defining characteristics of the Indo-European language family,
- **SLO 5.5** analyse the distribution and features of the Niger-Congo language family,
- **SLO 5.6** outline the distribution and features of the Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic language families,
- **SLO 5.7** define linguistic universals and explain their significance,
- **SLO 5.8** distinguish between phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic universals,
- **SLO 5.9** provide examples of linguistic universals across different languages,
- **SLO 5.10** evaluate the relevance of language families and universals for comparative linguistics,
- **SLO 5.11** assess how linguistic universals contribute to understanding human cognition and communication, and
- **SLO 5.12** apply insights from language families and universals to contexts such as language teaching and policy.

5.1 Understanding Language Families

5.1.1 Definition of a language family

A **language family** is a group of languages that share a common ancestral origin. Just as members of a human family are linked by bloodlines, languages within a family are connected by historical development and structural similarities. For example, English, French, and Spanish all belong to the Indo-European family because they evolved from a shared ancestral language. Recognising language families helps linguists trace the history of human communication and understand how languages evolve.

Fill in the blank: A group of languages that share a common ancestral origin is called a language

_____.



INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE FAMILY TREE

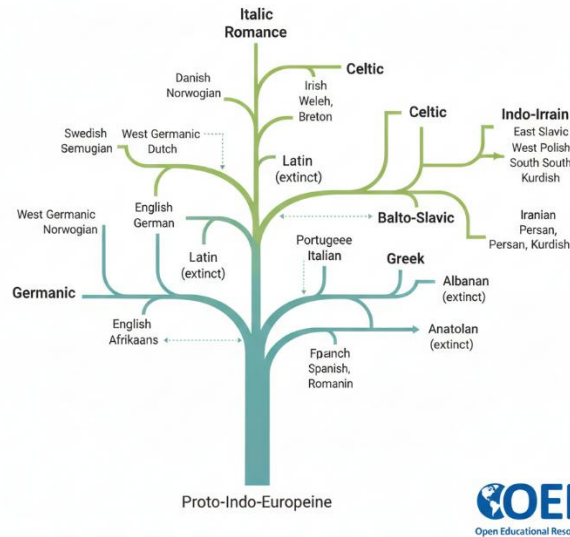


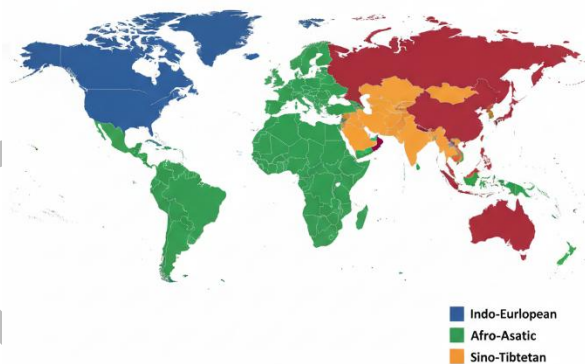
Figure 5.1 Concept of a language family tree

5.1.2 Major global language families

There are several major language families across the world. The **Indo-European family** is the most widespread, covering Europe, the Americas, and parts of Asia. The **Niger-Congo family** dominates Sub-Saharan Africa, while the **Sino-Tibetan family** includes Chinese and Tibetan languages. The **Afro-Asiatic family** covers North Africa and the Middle East. Each family has unique features but shares a common origin among its members.

Fill in the blank: The most widespread language family in the world is the _____ family.

GLOBAL LANGUAGE FAMILIES



Saturday, January 31, 2026 at 1:54 PM WAT

COER
Open Educational Resources



Plate 5.1 Distribution of major global language families

5.1.3 Methods of identifying and classifying language families

Linguists use several methods to classify languages into families. **Comparative linguistics** is the study of similarities and differences between languages to establish historical connections. Another method is **lexical comparison**, which examines shared vocabulary items. **Phonological analysis** looks at sound systems, while **syntactic comparison** considers sentence structures. These methods together help determine whether languages belong to the same family.

Fill in the blank: The study of similarities and differences between languages to establish historical connections is called comparative _____.

Method	Focus	Best For...
Lexical	Vocabulary Cognates	Establishing initial "family" links.
Phonological	Sound patterns	Dating when two languages split.
Syntactic	Sentence structure	Confirming relationships when words have changed.

Box 5.1 Methods of identifying language families

Copilot Questions 5.1

Objective questions

1. Which of the following best defines a language family? a. A group of unrelated languages spoken in the same region b. A group of languages sharing a common ancestral origin c. A set of dialects within one language d. A collection of borrowed words across languages
2. Which is the most widespread language family globally? a. Niger-Congo b. Afro-Asiatic c. Indo-European d. Sino-Tibetan
3. The study of similarities and differences between languages to establish historical connections is called _____.

Short-answer questions

4. Give one example of a language from the Niger-Congo family.
5. Explain briefly what is meant by “noun class system” in Niger-Congo languages.

Long-answer question

6. Analyse the importance of comparative linguistics in identifying language families, using examples from Indo-European and Niger-Congo.

5.2 Characteristics of Selected Language Families

5.2.1 Indo-European family: distribution and features



The **Indo-European family** is one of the most widely spoken language families in the world. It includes languages such as English, French, Spanish, Hindi, and Russian. A key feature of this family is **inflectional morphology**, which means words change their form to express grammatical relationships such as tense, case, or number. Its distribution spans Europe, Asia, and the Americas, largely due to colonisation, migration, and globalisation.

Fill in the blank: Languages such as English, French, and Hindi belong to the _____ family.

Language Branch	Example Languages	Key Defining Features
Germanic	English, German, Dutch, Swedish	Use of "strong" and "weak" verbs; fixed stress on the root syllable; significant consonant shifts from Proto-Indo-European (Grimm's Law).
Romance (Italic)	Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese	Descended from Vulgar Latin; extensive use of grammatical gender (Masculine/Feminine); highly inflected verb systems for mood and tense.
Indo-Aryan	Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit	Retains complex "case" systems in older forms; use of retroflex consonants; rich phonological distinctions (aspirated vs. unaspirated sounds).
Balto-Slavic	Russian, Polish, Lithuanian	Often preserves highly complex noun declensions (up to 7 cases); distinction between perfective and imperfective verb aspects.
Hellenic	Greek	High degree of synthesis; use of three genders (M/F/N); historical significance in developing technical and scientific vocabulary.

Table 5.1 Features of the Indo-European language family

5.2.2 Niger-Congo family: distribution and features

The **Niger-Congo family** is the largest language family in Africa, covering much of Sub-Saharan Africa. It includes languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Swahili. A distinctive feature of this family is the **noun class system**, where nouns are grouped into categories that influence agreement in verbs, adjectives, and pronouns. This system is similar to grammatical gender in Indo-European languages but is often more complex.

Fill in the blank: The Niger-Congo family is characterised by _____ class systems.



NIGER-CONGO NOUN CLASS SYSTEM Illustrated with Swahili (Kiswahili)

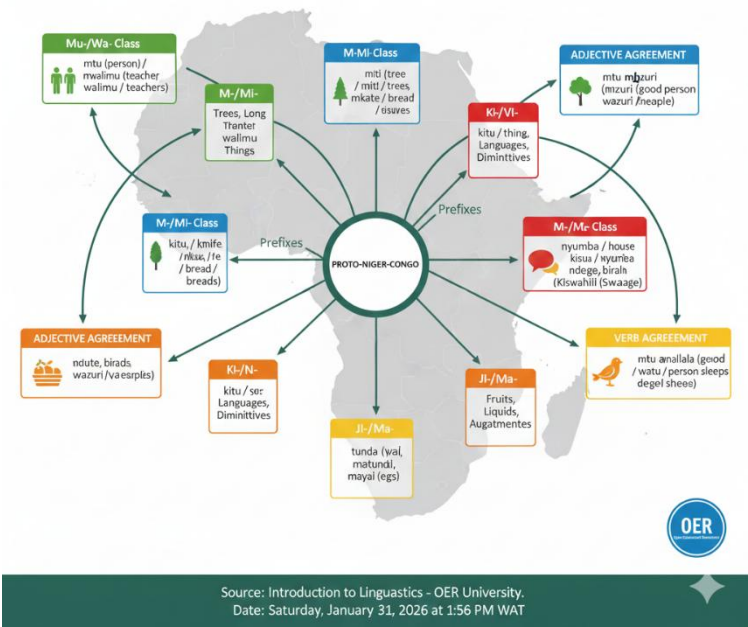


Figure 5.2 Noun class system in Niger-Congo languages

5.2.3 Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic families: distribution and features

The **Sino-Tibetan family** includes languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Tibetan. It is characterised by **tonal systems**, where pitch differences change the meaning of words. For example, the same syllable pronounced with a different tone can mean entirely different things.

The **Afro-Asiatic family** includes languages such as Arabic, Amharic, and Hausa. A defining feature of this family is **root-and-pattern morphology**, where words are formed from consonantal roots combined with vowel patterns. This system allows for a wide variety of word forms from a single root.

Fill in the blank: In the Sino-Tibetan family, pitch differences create meaning, a system known as _____.

Feature	Sino-Tibetan (e.g., Mandarin, Burmese)	Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic)
Core Mechanism	Tonal System: Pitch variations change the meaning of a syllable.	Root-and-Pattern: Consonantal "roots" provide the core meaning.
Morphology Type	Primarily Isolating/Analytic: Words tend to be monosyllabic and do not change form much.	Primarily Introflexive: Meaning is modified by changing internal vowels (non-concatenative).



Feature	Sino-Tibetan (e.g., Mandarin, Burmese)	Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic)
Example System	Tone: The syllable <i>ma</i> can mean "mother," "hemp," "horse," or "scold" depending on the pitch contour.	Root: The root <i>k-t-b</i> relates to "writing." Inserting different patterns creates <i>kataba</i> (he wrote) or <i>kitab</i> (book).
Phonology	Complex vowel systems and restricted consonant clusters.	Presence of Pharyngeal and Emphatic consonants (sounds produced deep in the throat).
Grammatical Markers	Uses particles and word order to indicate tense or pluralization.	Uses prefixes, suffixes, and internal vowel shifts to indicate gender, number, and tense.

Table 5.2 Features of Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic families

Copilot Questions 5.2

Objective questions

- Which of the following is a key feature of the Indo-European family? a. Tonal systems b. Inflectional morphology c. Root-and-pattern morphology d. Noun class systems
- Yoruba and Swahili belong to which language family? a. Indo-European b. Niger-Congo c. Sino-Tibetan d. Afro-Asiatic
- In the Sino-Tibetan family, meaning is distinguished by _____.

Short-answer questions

- Give two examples of languages from the Indo-European family.
- Briefly explain what is meant by "root-and-pattern morphology" in Afro-Asiatic languages.

Long-answer question

- Compare the defining features of the Niger-Congo and Sino-Tibetan language families, highlighting how each system influences communication.

5.3 Linguistic Universals

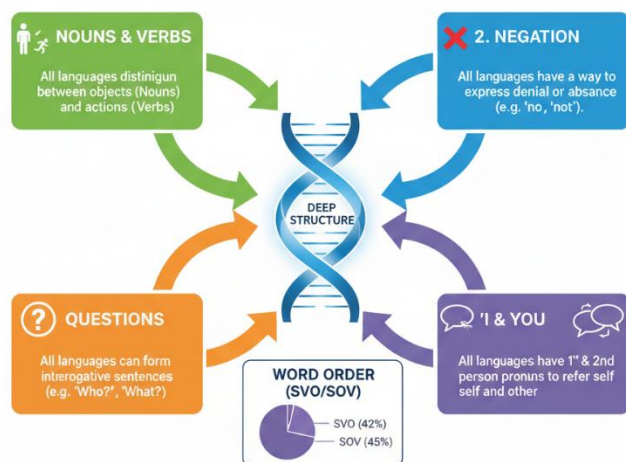
5.3.1 Definition of linguistic universals

Linguistic universals are features or patterns that occur across all human languages. They demonstrate that despite the diversity of languages, there are shared principles underlying human communication. Examples include the presence of vowels and consonants, the distinction between nouns and verbs, and the use of negation. These universals highlight the cognitive and communicative structures common to all humans.



Fill in the blank: Features or patterns found across all human languages are called linguistic _____.

LINGUISTIC UNIVERSALS: THE SHARED DNA OF LANGUAGE



Saturday, January 31, 2026 at 1:59:13 PM WAT

Figure 5.3 Examples of linguistic universals

5.3.2 Types of universals

There are different categories of linguistic universals:

- **Phonological universals** relate to sound systems. For instance, all languages have vowels.
- **Morphological universals** concern word formation, such as plural marking.
- **Syntactic universals** involve sentence structure, such as subject-verb-object order.
- **Semantic universals** relate to meaning, such as basic colour terms or kinship categories.

These categories help linguists organise and study the similarities across languages.

Fill in the blank: The presence of plural marking across languages is an example of a _____ universal.

Category	Description	Examples
Phonological	Constraints on the sound systems and patterns of languages.	All languages have consonants and vowels . If a language has nasal vowels, it also has oral vowels.



Category	Description	Examples
Morphological	Rules governing word formation and the relationship between roots and affixes.	If a language has a category of gender , it also has a category of number . Most languages use suffixes more than prefixes.
Syntactic	Universal patterns in sentence structure and word order.	Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) or SOV are the most common orders. If a language is VSO, it will have prepositions rather than postpositions.
Semantic	Commonality in how meaning is organized and categorized.	All languages have a way to express negation , ask questions, and distinguish between "one" and "more than one."

Box 5.2 Types of linguistic universals

5.3.3 Examples of universals across languages

Examples of universals include the use of pronouns, the distinction between questions and statements, and the presence of negation. These features show that while languages differ in form, they share underlying principles. For instance, every language has a way to ask questions and to express denial or contradiction.

Fill in the blank: The distinction between questions and statements is an example of a _____ universal.

Universal Feature	Description	Common Cross-Linguistic Examples
Pronouns	Systems used to distinguish the speaker, the listener, and others.	Every language has 1st person ("I"), 2nd person ("You"), and 3rd person ("He/She/They") distinctions.
Negation	The ability to express that a statement is false or that something is absent.	Words or particles meaning " No " or " Not " (e.g., English <i>not</i> , French <i>ne...pas</i> , Yoruba <i>kó</i>).
Question Forms	Grammatical structures or pitch changes used to seek information.	All languages can form " Yes/No " questions and " Wh- " questions (Who, What, Where, Why).
Color Hierarchy	A predictable order in which languages develop names for colors.	If a language has only two color terms, they are always Black and White . If it has three, the third is always Red .



Universal Feature	Description	Common Cross-Linguistic Examples
Noun/Verb Distinction	The fundamental separation between "things" and "actions."	There is no known language that lacks a way to distinguish between a subject (noun) and the act it performs (verb).
Deictic Terms	Words whose meaning depends on the context of the speaker (pointing words).	All languages have equivalents for "This" (near the speaker) and "That" (far from the speaker).

Table 5.3 Examples of linguistic universals across languages

Copilot Questions 5.3

Objective questions

- Which of the following is a linguistic universal? a. The use of pronouns b. The presence of borrowed words c. The existence of dialects d. The use of writing systems
- Which type of universal relates to sentence structure? a. Phonological b. Morphological c. Syntactic d. Semantic
- The presence of vowels in all languages is an example of a _____ universal.

Short-answer questions

- Give one example of a semantic universal.
- Briefly explain what is meant by “phonological universals.”

Long-answer question

- Discuss how linguistic universals demonstrate the shared cognitive structures of human communication, using examples from phonology and syntax.

5.4 Implications of Language Families and Universals

5.4.1 Relevance for comparative linguistics

The study of **comparative linguistics** involves examining similarities and differences across languages to understand their history and development. By analysing language families and universals, linguists can reconstruct ancestral languages, trace migration patterns, and establish relationships between cultures. This makes comparative linguistics a vital tool for uncovering the shared heritage of humanity.

Fill in the blank: The study of similarities and differences across languages to understand their history is called comparative _____.



Feature Analyzed	Indo-European	Niger-Congo	Sino-Tibetan
Primary Link	Phonological shifts	Noun class prefixes	Lexical cognates
Structural Focus	Inflectional endings	Agglutinative markers	Tonal contours
Reconstructed Ancestor	Proto-Indo-European	Proto-Niger-Congo	Proto-Sino-Tibetan

Figure 5.4 Comparative linguistics and language connections

5.4.2 Contribution to understanding human cognition and communication

Human cognition refers to the mental processes involved in acquiring knowledge and understanding, such as perception, memory, and reasoning. Linguistic universals reveal that all humans share cognitive structures for communication, regardless of the language they speak. For example, every language distinguishes between questions and statements, showing a universal way of organising thought. This demonstrates that language is not only a cultural tool but also a reflection of human cognitive abilities.

Fill in the blank: Linguistic universals reveal shared _____ structures for communication among all humans.

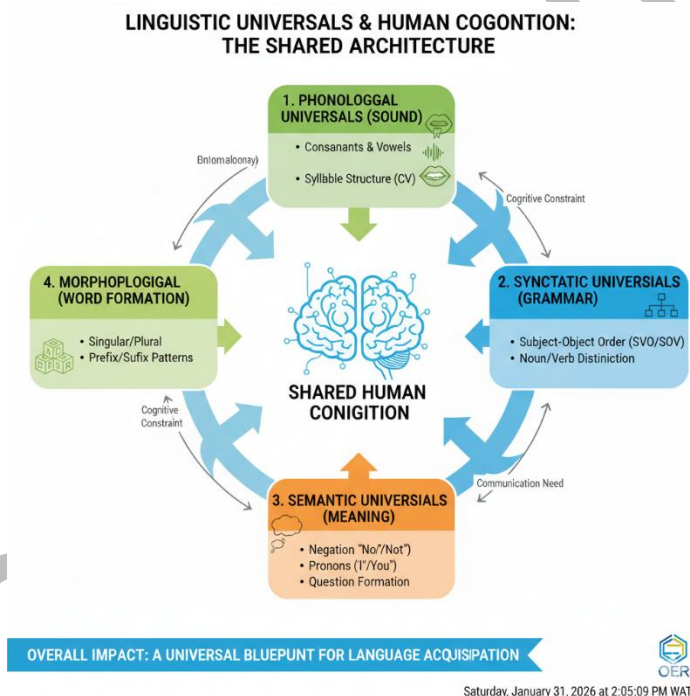


Figure 5.5 Linguistic universals and human cognition

5.4.3 Applications in language teaching and policy



Knowledge of language families and universals has practical applications in education and governance. In **language teaching**, teachers can anticipate common features learners may encounter, making instruction more effective. For instance, understanding universals such as pronouns or negation helps in designing teaching strategies that apply across languages. In **language policy**, governments can use insights from language families to support multilingual education and preserve minority languages. This ensures inclusivity and cultural diversity in societies.

Fill in the blank: Applying knowledge of language families and universals in schools supports _____ education.

Domain	Application	Benefit
Education	Contrastive Analysis	Reduces the time needed to achieve fluency in second languages.
Tech	Universal Grammar	Allows for the rapid development of Natural Language Processing (NLP) for "low-resource" languages.
Social	Inclusivity	Validates local dialects as part of a prestigious, historically significant family.

Box 5.3 Applications of language families and universals

Copilot Questions 5.4

Objective questions

- Which of the following is the main focus of comparative linguistics? a. Borrowing of words b. Historical connections between languages c. Writing systems d. Dialect variation
- Linguistic universals demonstrate shared _____ among humans. a. cultural traditions b. cognitive structures c. political systems d. geographical boundaries
- Applying knowledge of language families in schools supports _____ education.

Short-answer questions

- Give one example of how linguistic universals reflect human cognition.
- Briefly explain how language families can influence language policy.

Long-answer question

- Evaluate the importance of language families and universals in promoting multilingual education and preserving minority languages.

Series Summary

This Series has explored the purpose and relevance of studying language families and linguistic universals, showing how they provide insight into the history of human communication and the shared structures underlying all languages. We began by defining what language families are,



identifying major global examples, and examining methods of classification. We then moved on to the characteristics of selected families, including Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, and Afro-Asiatic, highlighting their distinctive features. Following that, we examined linguistic universals, considering their types and examples across languages. Finally, we discussed the wider implications of these concepts for comparative linguistics, human cognition, and practical applications in teaching and policy.

By completing this Series, you should now be able to define language families, identify and describe their key features, explain methods of classification, and distinguish between different types of linguistic universals. You should also be able to provide examples of universals across languages, evaluate their relevance for comparative linguistics, assess their contribution to understanding human cognition, and apply these insights to contexts such as education and language policy. In this way, the Series Learning Outcomes have been achieved, equipping you with both theoretical knowledge and practical perspectives on language families and universals.

Glossary of Terms

Afro-Asiatic-family

A group of languages spoken mainly in North Africa and the Middle East, including Arabic, Amharic, and Hausa. It is characterised by root-and-pattern morphology, where words are formed from consonantal roots combined with vowel patterns.

Comparative-linguistics

The study of similarities and differences between languages to establish historical connections and trace their development.

Cognition(human cognition)

The mental processes involved in acquiring knowledge and understanding, such as perception, memory, and reasoning.

Indo-European family

One of the most widespread language families, including English, French, Spanish, Hindi, and Russian. It is characterised by inflectional morphology, where words change form to express grammatical relationships.

Language family

A group of languages that share a common ancestral origin, connected by historical development and structural similarities.

Lexical comparison

A method of classifying languages by examining shared vocabulary items to determine possible relationships.

Linguistic universals

Features or patterns found across all human languages, such as the presence of vowels, pronouns, or negation.

Morphological universals

Shared features across languages related to word formation, such as plural marking.



Niger-Congo family

The largest language family in Africa, including Yoruba, Igbo, and Swahili. It is characterised by noun class systems, where nouns are grouped into categories that affect agreement in sentences.

Noun class system

A grammatical system in which nouns are grouped into categories that influence agreement with verbs, adjectives, and pronouns.

Phonological universals

Shared features across languages related to sound systems, such as the presence of vowels.

Root-and-pattern morphology

A system found in Afro-Asiatic languages where words are formed from consonantal roots combined with vowel patterns to create different meanings.

Semantic universals

Shared features across languages related to meaning, such as basic colour terms or kinship categories.

Sino-Tibetan family

A language family that includes Mandarin Chinese and Tibetan. It is characterised by tonal systems, where pitch differences change the meaning of words.

Syntactic universals

Shared features across languages related to sentence structure, such as subject-verb-object order.

Tonal system

A feature of some languages, such as those in the Sino-Tibetan family, where pitch differences change the meaning of words.

Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. Which of the following best defines a language family? a. A group of unrelated languages spoken in the same region b. A group of languages sharing a common ancestral origin c. A set of dialects within one language d. A collection of borrowed words across languages *(Linked to SLO 5.1)*
2. Which language family is characterised by noun class systems? a. Indo-European b. Niger-Congo c. Sino-Tibetan d. Afro-Asiatic *(Linked to SLO 5.5)*
3. The presence of vowels in all languages is an example of a _____ universal. *(Linked to SLO 5.8)*
4. Which of the following is a practical application of studying language families and universals? a. Designing computer hardware b. Supporting multilingual education c. Developing agricultural tools d. Creating musical instruments *(Linked to SLO 5.12)*

Short-Answer Questions

5. Define comparative linguistics and explain its purpose. *(Linked to SLO 5.3 and SLO 5.10)*



6. Give two examples of languages from the Indo-European family and describe one of its defining features. (*Linked to SLO 5.4*)
7. Briefly explain what is meant by “root-and-pattern morphology” in Afro-Asiatic languages. (*Linked to SLO 5.6*)
8. Provide one example of a semantic universal and explain why it is considered universal. (*Linked to SLO 5.8*)

Long-Answer Questions

9. Analyse the importance of linguistic universals in understanding human cognition and communication. (*Linked to SLO 5.11*)
10. Evaluate the role of language families and universals in shaping language teaching and policy, using examples from at least two families. (*Linked to SLO 5.12*)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. b. A group of languages sharing a common ancestral origin
2. b. Niger-Congo
3. Phonological universal
4. b. Supporting multilingual education

Short-Answer Questions

5. Comparative linguistics is the study of similarities and differences between languages to establish historical connections. Its purpose is to reconstruct ancestral languages and trace cultural and migration patterns.
6. Examples: English and Hindi. A defining feature of Indo-European languages is inflectional morphology, where words change form to express grammatical relationships.
7. Root-and-pattern morphology is a system in Afro-Asiatic languages where words are formed from consonantal roots combined with vowel patterns, producing a variety of word forms.
8. An example is basic colour terms (e.g., “red”). It is considered universal because all languages have words to describe fundamental colours.

Long-Answer Questions

9. *Basic response:* Linguistic universals are important because they show that all humans share common structures in communication, such as the distinction between questions and statements. This reflects shared cognitive processes across cultures. *Value-added response:* Beyond the basics, linguistic universals also provide evidence for theories of language acquisition and cognitive science. They suggest that the human brain is predisposed to organise language in certain ways, supporting research in neurolinguistics and psychology.
10. *Basic response:* Language families and universals shape teaching by helping educators anticipate common features learners may encounter, such as pronouns or negation. In policy, they



support multilingual education and preservation of minority languages. *Value-added response:* Outstanding learners may note that these insights also influence curriculum design, translation studies, and language technology development. For example, recognising tonal systems in Sino-Tibetan languages or noun class systems in Niger-Congo can guide the creation of inclusive teaching materials and inform government policies on linguistic diversity.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 5]

Part 5.1 Understanding Language Families

1. Language family
2. Indo-European family
3. Comparative linguistics

Part 5.2 Characteristics of Selected Language Families

4. Inflectional morphology
5. Niger-Congo family
6. Tonal system

Part 5.3 Linguistic Universals

7. Linguistic universals
8. Morphological universal
9. Syntactic universal

Part 5.4 Implications of Language Families and Universals

10. Comparative linguistics
11. Cognitive
12. Multilingual

References and Attributions [Series 5]

General References Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. Comrie, B. (2009). *The World's Major Languages* (2nd ed.). Routledge. Campbell, L. (2013). *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh University Press. Open Educational Resources (OER Commons). (n.d.). *Language families and linguistic universals*. Retrieved from <https://www.oercommons.org>

Figures and Plates

- *Figure 5.1 Concept of a language family tree* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram of a language family tree showing English, French, and Spanish as branches of Indo-European.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation.



- *Plate 5.1 Distribution of major global language families* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a world map showing Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, and Afro-Asiatic language families.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation. Suggested OER source: “World map distribution of language families” (OER Commons).
- *Figure 5.2 Noun class system in Niger-Congo languages* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram showing noun class systems in Niger-Congo languages like Swahili.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation. Suggested OER source: “Niger-Congo noun class system diagram” (OER Commons).
- *Figure 5.3 Examples of linguistic universals* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram showing examples of linguistic universals such as nouns, verbs, and negation.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation. Suggested OER source: “Examples of linguistic universals diagram” (OER Commons).
- *Figure 5.4 Comparative linguistics and language connections* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram showing comparative linguistics linking Indo-European, Niger-Congo, and Sino-Tibetan languages.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation. Suggested OER source: “Comparative linguistics diagram” (OER Commons).
- *Figure 5.5 Linguistic universals and human cognition* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a diagram showing how linguistic universals reflect shared human cognition and communication.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot graphic generation. Suggested OER source: “Linguistic universals human cognition diagram” (OER Commons).

Tables and Boxes

- *Table 5.1 Features of the Indo-European language family* AI-generated using prompt: “Create a table showing examples of Indo-European languages and their features such as inflectional morphology.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot table generation. Suggested OER source: “Indo-European language family features OER table.”
- *Table 5.2 Features of Sino-Tibetan and Afro-Asiatic families* AI-generated using prompt: “Create a table comparing Sino-Tibetan tonal systems and Afro-Asiatic root-and-pattern morphology.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot table generation. Suggested OER source: “Sino-Tibetan Afro-Asiatic language family features OER table.”
- *Table 5.3 Examples of linguistic universals across languages* AI-generated using prompt: “Create a table listing examples of linguistic universals across languages such as pronouns and negation.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot table generation. Suggested OER source: “Examples of linguistic universals across languages OER table.”
- *Box 5.1 Methods of identifying language families* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising methods of identifying language families including comparative linguistics and lexical comparison.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot box generation. Suggested OER source: “Methods of identifying language families comparative linguistics OER summary.”
- *Box 5.2 Types of linguistic universals* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising types of linguistic universals with examples.” Tool/platform: Microsoft



Copilot box generation. Suggested OER source: “Types of linguistic universals phonological morphological syntactic semantic OER summary.”

- *Box 5.3 Applications of language families and universals* AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising applications of language families and universals in teaching and policy.” Tool/platform: Microsoft Copilot box generation. Suggested OER source: “Applications of language families and universals OER summary.”

