Introduction

Language is the system of human communication using words, written and spoken, and particular ways of combining them (syntax), and includes any such system employed by a community, a nation, etc. Regarding this human communication, there are several main language families, including:

1) Indo-European languages
2) Afro-Asiatic languages (Hamito-Semitic Languages)
3) Sino-Tibetan languages
4) Austro-Asiatic languages
5) Tai languages
6) Austronesian languages
7) Altaic languages
8) Japanese language
9) Korean language
10) Palaeosiberian languages
11) Uralic languages
12) Niger-Congo languages
13) Eskimo-Aleut languages
14) Australian Aboriginal languages
15) North American Indian languages
16) Mexican and Central American Indian languages
17) South American and Caribbean Indian languages
18) Burushaski Language
19) Dravidian languages

1. Indo-European Languages

The Indo-European languages are a family of languages that were spoken originally throughout Europe, Asia Minor (present-day Asian Turkey), Iran, northern and central India, and as far eastward as Chinese Turkistan.

Following the period of European colonial expansion, which began in the late 15th century, modern Indo-European languages (notably English, and the Romance languages of French, Spanish, and Portuguese) spread to much of the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australasia, and the continent of Africa.

Virtually all the modern languages of Europe belong to the Indo-European language group - the only exceptions being Basque, Finnish, Hungarian, and Turkish. Hittite is the earliest
known Indo-European language, and this was spoken in Anatolia (modern Turkey) and Syria in the second and first millennia BC.

The Indo-European language family-members share characteristics such as basic vocabulary and grammatical inflections. The parent language (proto-Indo-European) can be reconstructed by comparing the daughter languages, especially the ancient ones. Consequently, it appears that proto-Indo-European was spoken some time before 3000 BC, and split up during the subsequent millennia.

There are ten branches to the Indo-European language family, which are listed below in order of antiquity:

1. **Anatolian** (Anatolia (modern Turkey) and Syria)
   Hittite, Luwian, Lycian, Lydian, and Palaic (all extinct)

2. **Indo-Iranian** (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, and Tajikistan)
   i. Indic (Indo-Aryan)
      Sanskrit, Prakrit (Maharastri, Shauraseni, and Pali), Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi/Panjabi, Pashtu, Sindhi, Oriya, Nepali, and Romany
   ii. Iranian
      Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian, Parthian, ‘Eastern Group’, modern Persian (Farsi), Pashto, Tajik, and Kurdish

3. **Hellenic** (Greece)
   Greek

4. **Italic** (Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Switzerland, Andorra, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, North Africa, Canada, Romania and Moldova)
   i. Oscan-Umbrian
      Oscan (survives only in inscriptions), and Umbrian (extinct)
   ii. Latin-Faliscan
      Romance languages and derivatives: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian, Rhetic, Catalan, Galician, Sardinian, Occitan, Dalmatian (extinct), Arumanian, and Megleno

5. **Germanic** (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, England, Belgium, Holland, Friesland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and South Africa)
   i. East Germanic
      Gothic (extinct)
   ii. North Germanic
      a. West Scandinavian
         Icelandic, Faeroese, and Norwegian
      b. East Scandinavian
         Danish, and Swedish
   iii. West Germanic
      a. Anglo-Frisian
         English, and Frisian (closet relative of English)
      b. Netherlandic-German
         German, Dutch-Flemish, Yiddish, and Afrikaans

6. **Armenian** (Armenia, Turkey, and Iran)
   Eastern Armenian, and Western Armenian

7. **Tocharian** (now extinct - once spoken in what is now northern Chinese Turkistan)

8. **Celtic** (Ireland, Scotland, Isle of Man, Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall)
   i. Goidelic (Q-Celtic)
      Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic, and Manx Gaelic
ii. Brythonic (P-Celtic)
Welsh, Cornish (extinct), Breton, and Gaulish

9. Balto-Slavic (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, (Central and Eastern Europe))
   i. Slavic
      a. South Slavic
         Serbo-Croatian (including Serbian), Slovene, Macedonian, and Bulgarian
      b. West Slavic
         Czech, Slovak, Polish
      c. East Slavic
         Russian, Belorussian/Belorussian/Byelorussian, Ukrainian
   ii. Baltic
      Latvian/Lettish/Lett, Lithuanian, and Old Prussian (extinct)

10. Albanian (Albania and southern Yugoslavia)
   i. Northern
      Gheg dialect
   ii. Southern
      Tosk dialect

Friesland is a northern province of the Netherlands, bounded to the north by the Wadden Sea and to the south by Lake Ijssel. Friesland’s area is 3,357 sq. km. (1,297 sq. miles), and its population is +/-600,000. The capital of Friesland is Leeuwarden.

Frisian is the Germanic language of Friesland, as is the most closely related language to English. It has +/-400,000 speakers.

2. Afro-Asiatic languages (Hamito-Semitic Languages)
   Afro-Asiatic languages (Hamito-Semitic Languages) are a group of languages in North Africa, Morocco, northern Algeria, Libya, and Egypt, and in a large central-Saharan area in Niger, Mali, and southern Algeria. There are five main branches to the Afro-Asiatic languages:

1. Semitic (North Africa, Ethiopia, Arabian Peninsula, Middle East, Israel, Palestine, and Malta)
   i. Eastern
      Akkadian, Babylonian, Sumerian, and Assyrian
   ii. Western
      a. Central
         Arabic, Maltese, Hebrew, Syriac, Phoenician (extinct), and Aramaic
      b. South
         Tigrinya, and Amharic

2. Ancient Egyptian (extinct)
   Coptic (extinct)

   Numidian (ancient Libyan), Tuareg, Kabyle, Riff, and Schluh

4. Chadic (Central Sub-Saharan Africa to the west, south, and east of Lake Chad)
   Hausa
5. **Cushitic** (Somalia, Ethiopia, northern Kenya and area spanning Egypt-Sudan border (between Nile and Red Sea))
   - i. Northern Cushitic
     - Beja
   - ii. Eastern Cushitic
     - Galla (Oromo), and Somali
   - iii. Southern Cushitic
   - iv. Western Cushitic (Omotic)
   - v. Central Cushitic

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3. **Sino-Tibetan languages**

Sino-Tibetan languages are the second largest group of languages in the world, with well over 1 billion speakers. It has two branches:

1. **Sinitic** (China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan)
   - i. Chinese, modern Chinese, and Mandarin
   - ii. Hakka
   - iii. Min
   - iv. Wu
   - v. Yue
     - Cantonese

2. **Tibeto-Burman** (Tibet, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, northern India, Bangladesh)
   - Tibetan, and Burmese

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4. **Austro-Asiatic languages**

Austro-Asiatic languages are a group of languages that are spoken in southeast Asia ('austro-' means 'south'), in an area stretching from north-eastern India across to Vietnam and Malaysia. The family consists of three branches:

1. **Nicobarese** (Nicobar Islands (Bay of Bengal)
   - Nicobar (closely related to Mon-Khmer)

2. **Munda** (north-east India)
   - Mundari, and Santali

3. **Mon-Khmer** (Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos)
   - Mon, Khmer/Kmer, and Vietnamese

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5. **Tai languages**

Tai languages are a group of around sixty closely related languages spoken in Thailand and Laos, as well as in northern Myanmar (Burma) and Assam to the west, and northern Vietnam and southern China to the east. They are spoken by over 60 million people. The languages fall into three sub-groups:

**Tai language** (Thailand, Laos, northern Myanmar (Burma), Assam, northern Vietnam, southern China)
- Siamese (Thailand)
6. Austronesian languages

Austronesian languages are a large group of languages spread over a huge area in the Indian and Pacific oceans. The central area in which they are spoken is Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines; they extend west to Madagascar, and east to New Zealand and the Pacific islands (‘Austronesian’ means ‘southern islands’). Despite the large distances involved, the languages are all remarkably similar to each other, which makes internal sub-grouping difficult:

**Malayo-Polynesian** (Indian and Pacific Oceans, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Madagascar, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Taiwan, Papua)

i. Western
   - Fijian, Javanese, **Malay-Indonesian**, Tagalog, Sundanese, Cebuano, Malagasy, Madurese, and Filipino/Pilipino (based on Tagalog)

ii. Eastern (Oceanic languages)
   - Samoan, Tahitian, Tongan, Maori, and Hawaiian (close to extinction)

7. Altaic languages

Altaic is a family of languages, named after the Altai Mountains (central Asia), which consists of three language-groups. It is not completely clear whether these three form a genetically related group (that is, are descended from one parent language), or whether they owe their undoubted similarities to centuries of contact and mutual influence:

**Altaic** (Turkey eastwards through Central Asia to north-west China and far into Siberia, Mongolia, Buryat, Kalmyk, Siberia to northern China)

i. Turkic (30 languages, including:)
   - Turkish, Azerbaijani, Uigur, Tatar, Azeri, Kazakh/Kazak, Kirghiz, Turkmen, and Uzbek

ii. Mongolian (12 languages, including:)
   - Mongol/Mongolian, Buryat/Buriat, Kalmuck/Kalmyk, and Khalkha

iii. Manchu-Tungus (16 languages, including:)
   - Manchu, and Tungus

8. Japanese language

Japanese language, the language spoken by 123 million people in Japan. It is unclear what other languages Japanese is related to, and there has been considerable argument over this question. It seems to be distantly related to Korean, and many scholars now connect it with the Altaic group:

**Japanese** (Japan)
9. Korean language

Korean language is the language spoken in North and South Korea by 64 million people. It is not closely related to any other language, but has been connected with Altaic by many scholars, and may be distantly related to Japanese:

Korean (North and South Korea)
   i. North
      Pyongyang dialect
   ii. South
      Seoul dialect

10. Palaeosiberian languages

Palaeosiberian languages are a group of four very small languages which are not genetically related, but which are grouped together because of the similarities arising from extended contact and mutual influence. They once occupied large parts of Siberia and eastern Asia, but they were pushed to the periphery by other languages (notably Altaic and Russian), hence the name ‘Palaeosiberian’, which means ‘old Siberian’:

Palaeosiberian (Siberia and eastern Asia)
   i. Luorawetlan (Chukchi-Kamchatkan) (5 languages, including:)
      Chukchi
   ii. Gilyuk (language isolate)
   iii. Yeniseian
      Ket
   iv. Yukaghir

11. Uralic languages

Uralic languages are a family of languages spoken over a large area of northern Europe and Asia. They stretch from northern Scandinavia and the Baltic region across the Ural Mountains into northern Asia and Siberia. Uralic has two branches:

Uralic (Russia, Siberia, northern Scandinavia, Baltic region, Ural Mountains, northern Asia)
   i. Finno-Ugric
      a. Finnic
         Finnish (Suomi), and Estonian
      b. Ugric
         Hungarian (Magyar), Mansi, and Khant
   ii. Samoyedic (4 languages, including:)
      Nenets

12. Niger-Congo languages

Niger-Congo languages are the main language-group of the southern two-thirds of Africa, stretching as far north as Senegal on the west coast, and southern Kenya on the east coast. It is a vast and very diverse family, with over 1,000 languages and numerous dialects. Scholars
have divided Niger-Congo languages into six main groups that represent divisions that occurred over 5,000 years ago:

**Niger-Congo** (Africa) (over 1,000 languages, including:)
   i. Adamawa-Eastern (112 languages))
   ii. Benue-Congo (Niger-Kordofanian) (557 languages, including:)
      Bantu (southern half of Africa)
      Bemba, Fang, Ganda, Kikuyu, Kongo, Lingala, Luba, Makua, Mbundu, Ruanda, Rundi, Shona, Sindebele, Sotho, Swahili, Swazi, Thonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu
   iii. Kwa (73 languages, including:)
      Yoruba, Akan, and Igbo
   iv. Mwande (26 languages)
   v. Voltaic (Gur) (79 languages, including:)
      Dogon
   vi. West Atlantic (43 languages, including:)
      Fulani

13. **Eskimo-Aleut languages**

Eskimo-Aleut languages are a group of about ten languages spoken by 90,000 people in Greenland, northern Canada, Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, and the Chukchi Peninsula of Siberia.

**Eskimo-Aleut** (Greenland, northern Canada, Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, and the Chukchi Peninsula of Siberia)
   Eskimo
   i. Yupik, Inupiaq, and Inuktut
   ii. Aleut

14. **Australian Aboriginal languages**

Australian Aboriginal languages included around 200 languages that were spoken over the whole continent of Australia before colonisation. The languages, like their speakers, were disastrously affected by the European invasions, which started at the end of the 18th century. Fifty languages are now extinct, and around a hundred more will apparently soon be extinct; many of these are now remembered by just a few old people. This leaves perhaps fifty languages that have a good chance of survival. The number of speakers is estimated to be fewer than 50,000.

**Australian Aboriginal** (Australia) (200 languages, including:)
   i. North
   ii. Pama-Nyungan
      Aranda

15. **North American Indian languages**

North American Indian languages are languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of Canada and North America before the arrival of Europeans, who had a disastrous effect on
them. Fewer than half of the 300 languages that were originally spoken in North America has survived, and many are remembered now by just a few old people:

**North American languages** (Alaska and western Canada, and in a substantial island stretching over California, Arizona, New Mexico, centre and eastern coast of the USA, and southern Mexico)

i. Na-Dene (34 languages, including:)
   - Navaho, and Apache

ii. Northern Amerind
   a. Almosan
      - Algolkanian
   b. Keres-Siouan
   c. Penutian,
   d. Hokan (28 languages)

16. Mexican and Central American Indian languages

Mexican and Central American Indian languages are languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of Central America before the Spanish invasion of 1519. Most are still spoken, in spite of a dramatic fall in the number of speakers, but linguistic boundaries do not correspond with modern political borders. The region is a meeting-place for the language groups of North and South America. It is generally believed that the indigenous peoples of South America travelled there from the north via this narrow area, which is an argument in favour of the theory that most American Indian languages are related, however distantly.

**Mexican Languages** (Mexico, Central America from Guatemala to Panama)

- Hokan, Penutian (includes: Yucatec, Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, and Mam), Chibchan-Paezan

i. Uto-Aztecan
   - Comanche, Hopi, and Aztec

ii. Oto-Manguean (17 languages)
   - Otomi, Mixtec, and Zapotec

**Central American languages** (Meso-America - the isthmus joining North and South America, extending from Mexico to Colombia)

i. Northern Amerind

ii. Central Amerind
   a. Uto-Aztecan
      - Comanche, Hopi, and Aztec
   b. Oto-Manguean (17 languages, including:)
      - Otomi, Mixtec, and Zapotec

iii. Chibchan-Paezan

17. South American and Caribbean Indian languages

South American and Caribbean Indian languages are the languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of this region before the arrival of European (mainly Spanish and Portuguese) invaders. The task of classifying them into groups is difficult and controversial. The languages can be divided into four main groups, which may be distantly related to each other and to the Amerind families of North and Central America:
**South American and Caribbean Indian languages** (South America, and Caribbean)
   i. Chibchan-Paezan  
   ii. Andean Quechua
   iii. Equatorial-Tucanoan (50 languages)  
   iv. Ge-Pano-Carib Ge, Pano, and Carib

**Caribbean languages** (Caribbean islands and all over northern and central South America)
   i. Arawak  
   ii. Tupi

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18. Burushaski Language

The Burushaski Language is a language spoken by the Burusho people living in the Gilgit territory of north-western Kashmir. Burushaski is a 'language isolate', not known to be related to any other language of the world.

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19. Dravidian languages

Dravidian languages are a group of languages spoken in southern India and northern Sri Lanka, though there are also isolated groups of speakers in north-eastern India and central Pakistan. With over 170 million speakers, this group is the fourth largest in the world. It consists of about twenty-five languages that can be divided into four sub-groups:

**Dravidian languages** (India and northern Sri Lanka, north-eastern India and central Pakistan)

*Sinhalese* (Sri Lanka)
   i. North-West Brahui
   ii. North-East Kurukh, and Malti
   iii. Central Kui, and *Telugu*
   iv. Southern *Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada/Kanarese,* and Tulu

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Number of Speakers (millions) – Main Language groups

The following languages are noted in italics in the language families above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>Russian</td>
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<td>Bengali</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
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<td>Malay-Indonesian</td>
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<td>Japanese</td>
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<td>German</td>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punjabi (Punjab, Pakistan, India)</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korean (Korea, China, Japan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telugu (Andhra Pradesh, SE India)</td>
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<td>Marathi (Maharashtra, India)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil (Tamil Nadu, India, Sri Lanka)</td>
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<td>Cantonese (China, Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>Wu (Shanghai Region, China)</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Javanese (Java, Indonesia)</td>
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<td>Vietnamese</td>
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<td>Turkish</td>
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<td>Min (SE China, Taiwan, Malaysia)</td>
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<td>Thai</td>
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<td>Swahili</td>
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<td>Kannada/Kanarese (S India)</td>
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<td>Tagalog (Philippines)</td>
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<td>Gujariti (WC India, S Pakistan)</td>
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<td>Hausa (N Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon)</td>
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<td>Oriya (C and E India)</td>
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<td>Sundanese (Sunda Strait, Indonesia)</td>
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<td>Yoruba (SW Nigeria, Zou, Benin)</td>
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<td>Amharic (Ethiopia)</td>
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<td>Igbo (Lower Niger, Nigeria)</td>
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<td>Sindhi (SE Pakistan, W India)</td>
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<td>Azerbaijani</td>
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<td>Zhuang (S China)</td>
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<td>Hungarian</td>
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<td>Nepali (Nepal, NE India, Bhutan)</td>
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<td>Cebuano (Bohol Sea, Philippines)</td>
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<td>Fula (Cameroon, Nigeria)</td>
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<td>Sinhalese (Sri Lanka)</td>
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<td>Uzbek</td>
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<td>Malagasy (Madagascar)</td>
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<td>Greek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afrikaans (South Africa)</td>
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<td>Belarusian/Belorussian/Byelorussian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurdish (SW of Caspian Sea)</td>
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<td>Madurese (Madura, Indonesia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oromo (W Ethiopia, N Keyna)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

End

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Appendix

Maps

Berber Language

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Berber Speakers as Percentage of a Country’s Population

Berber Language Speakers
Number of Berber Speakers (1990 estimates)

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English in Europe

Stripes indicate areas where bilingualism is common.
Frisian Netherlandic German language

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Indo-Euro
Proto Germanic language
Slavic languages

Map showing distribution of Slavic languages across Europe.
Tai languages

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